LE MORTE DARTHUR OF SIR THOMAS MALORY

& ITS SOURCES

BY VIDA D. SCUDDER

W. L. Werner

The Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory

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TO

"THE ONELIE BEGETTER"

OF THIS BOOK

MY FELLOW-ADVENTURER IN THE REALMS OF OLD ROMANCE

J. M. DENT

PREFACE

OUT of the least vital period in English letters, the fifteenth century, comes one vital book: the *Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory*. Never completely forgotten even when the ages of romance were most discredited, its fascination for all classes of readers has increased ever since the romantic revival of the early nineteenth century. Poets and scholars have delighted in it no less than children, and its importance grows clearer as the importance of the Middle Ages becomes more recognized.

For the time has passed when the significance of mediæval literature to the modern world can be minimized. Again and again, men have tried to break with the great mediæval tradition. To the Revolution, the exalting of humanity involved the overthrow of all ancient things. To the eighteenth century, even Shakespeare was Gothicke, and the ages behind him were descried only to be flouted. The Renascence called a sharp About Face! from the epoch of mystery and romance, and turned enthusiasm toward the precise standards of classic antiquity. But all these reactions are now over. It is perceived that the Middle Ages are not a dark, half-barbarous interlude between two periods of ordered light, but a world illumined by beauty and by law, and this world has an increasing attraction for us. In proportion as we

have learned that nothing ever truly experienced by the spirit can in a true sense be outgrown, we turn to it reverently, eager to receive its revelation and to drink from the sources of its joy. Mediæval mystics have a word for us, mediæval music sounds around our altars, mediæval art claims an ever-larger measure of devotion, and mediæval literature waits to be studied as one of the great imaginative expressions of the race.

In this literature, romance holds a leading place. True, the Latinists of the Middle Ages have a power and a value hardly yet appreciated; it has been rightly pointed out that Carlyle, Ruskin, Bergson, would have written in Latin had they lived in the thirteenth century, and the mediæval philosophers and theologians are as great men as their modern successors. But the writings in the vernacular are warmer with the touch of life. Among these, the romance-cycles are of prime importance, among those cycles, none is so central as the Arthurian, and in the long development of Arthurian romance, Malory's *Morte*, for English readers at least, marks the glorious consummation. That is the reason for this book.

In the revival of mediæval studies, three phases may be distinguished: there is a sentimental approach, there is a scholastic approach, and there is an interpretive approach made possible by the other two. The first approach, eagerly sympathetic but uncritical, marked the early years of the modern romantic movement; but its superficialities were checked before long, and a serious scholarship arose for which one can hardly feel too grateful. M. Joseph Bédier, himself one of the most notable contemporary scholars, appraises its work with rare felicity:

After the hasty generalizations, brilliant and useless, of the school of Raynouard, Fauriel, Ampère,[1] when intelligent understanding of the Middle Ages was compromised by the inaccurate and flashy tendencies of romanticism, a reaction to erudition had to happen. It is well that a generation should have sacrificed itself conscientiously and religiously to an obscure and necessary work. These learned men know as well as any one that the world of general ideas is the only world worth living in,—and they have forbidden themselves to penetrate it. They know that the facts which they exhaust themselves to establish have no value at all as mere facts, but are worth while only if laws can be inferred from them,—and they are aware that usually others than themselves will discover these laws. They know that scientific labor is acquainted with no joy except synthesis, and they have stayed imprisoned in minute analyses. They have been willing to write for twenty readers, content to work for those who are to come. But thanks to this very beautiful generation of scholars, a day will soon arrive when, the great works of our national adolescence being at last dated, localized, restored in their primal integrity and splendor, the image of the Middle Ages can be developed with the fair clarity, the logic and the harmonics, of our classic period.[2]

This day has not yet fully arrived, but it is dawning. In Arthurian romance, a portion of the mediæval heritage which England shares with France in a peculiar sense, the researches of scholars will still be needed for many a year; but splendid results have already been achieved. Hidden things have been brought to light, misapprehensions rectified, relations determined, sources interminably discussed and occasionally discovered, and although many conclusions are tenta-

[1] English names might be substituted.

[2] Les Lais de Marie de France. Revue des Deux Mondes, 1891.

tive, and there are still vast lacunæ in knowledge, the point has already been reached when Everyman can attain a fresh comprehension of the whole Arthurian development. New treasures, unsuspected by his fathers, are open to him. To glance at the romance material accessible for the general reader in the days of Scott or even of Tennyson, is to realize what gifts the scholars have brought us. Even half a century ago, the ordinary man of culture might have been hard put to it to mention three mediæval poets, exclusive of Dante, before the fourteenth century. To-day, a number of vivid figures invite his attention. They are coming more within his reach every year, through cheap editions and good translations. It is a pity to know literature through translation, yet better see beauty through a veil than not at all. Moreover, mediæval poets suffer less than the classics from being translated, for though they have pleasant qualities of style, they wrote when there was no "sacred language," in a vernacular still tentative and fluid; and they owe their distinction less to precision or purity of phrase than to opulence of invention and freshness of feeling.

With this rich material now generally available, and with the many accessions to definite knowledge about the whole romance-development, it would seem that the time is ripe for interpretive study. Many mediæval books, in the light thrown upon them by scholastic research, may now be considered from the point of view not of process but of product, not of scholarship but of pure letters. Malory's *Morte Darthur* is one of these books, it can be appreciated to-day as never before. Placed in its true setting and against its true background, rightly related to its predecessors as the climax of a long development, it acquires new and

striking significance, both as a social document and as a work of art.

The present volume is based on fifteen years' study of Arthurian romance with College classes. It makes no claim to explore new territory, but it hopes to fill the modest function of guide to a lovely country which is too rarely visited except by pioneers.

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PART I

MALORY'S PREDECESSORS

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARIES

I

THIS book is to concern itself with Arthurian romances which are intimately connected with England, and which belong in the sequence leading up to the *Morte Darthur* of Sir Thomas Malory. Three periods may be distinguished in the story of Arthurian romance. The first is that of origins, and it lasts from the fifth century to the twelfth. Legends were doubtless forming long before the opening of this period; prehistoric race-experience has bequeathed traces of myth which linger in romance to the end of the chapter. But the definite legend dates from the fifth century, when a real British chief, possibly defender of ancient Celtic Christianity, may have driven the heathen Saxon invaders temporarily back in a series of battles. The second period is that of literary creation. It begins with the pseudo-historical chronicle, *Historia Regum Britanniæ*, by the Welshman Geoffrey of Monmouth, finished before 1139, and it lasts about a century—a marvelous century, in which the creative imagination worked at white heat. There are three phases in the Arthurian literature of this period: pseudo-historical chronicles, in either prose or verse, claiming to present authentic story; romance-poems,

frankly divorced from reality; and prose romances, slightly later than the poems, and the chief direct source of Malory. If the period opens with Geoffrey's *History*, it may be said to close, in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, with the work of two German poets, Gottfried von Strassburg and Wolfram von Eschenbach. During the interim, all the great romance cycles had reached full development. Lancelot, Galahad, Tristan, Perceval, had rallied to the court of Arthur, and the ostensibly historical method of Geoffrey had yielded to the full romantic tone. After this period, little or nothing original was added to the stories, but the creative epoch was followed by a long epoch of translation and adaptation, that lasted through the fifteenth century, till the renascence and the invention of printing produced a change of taste which slowly but surely put an end to the mediæval world of thought and feeling.

Perhaps no other romances were so widely spread as those of Arthur and his knights. France has her cycle of Charlemagne stories, which spread to Italy; Iceland has her Sigurd, Spain has her Cid. But all Europe shares the tradition of Arthur. Versions of Arthurian romance appear not only south of the Alps but as far north as Iceland. Arthur, with other ancestors of Maximilian, stands guard by the emperor's tomb in the Tyrol; his knights gave names to Italian babies in the eleventh century, and themes to Lombard sculptors in the twelfth; his court held balanced sway with that of the Holy Grail to the German imagination of Wolfram von Eschenbach. During the creative period, the great bulk of the romances is written in French, and bears the stamp of French ideals.

But if Arthurian romance is thus widely spread, its

interest for English readers is still more due to its intimate relations with national life. Not France, the land which glorified him, but England, the land on which he shed his glory, is Arthur's natural background. The fact is the more striking because the Anglo-Saxon race can not enter a claim to the great king on the score of blood-kinship. In Arthur, the conquered Celt took one of the revenges for which he is famous: he furnished the ideal hero to the people by whom he had been overcome. That is because land, not race, is habitually the important point in national epics, and he who has defended the soil against the invader lives in the heart of that very invader's descendants as the protector of the common country. Arthurian romance has its roots deep in British soil. This is the reason why, despite its expansion on the Continent, despite the fact that the greater portion of the literature was written in French, the story claims the peculiar allegiance of Englishmen.

In the period of origins, the British Isles play, of course, a leading part. There has been much discussion whether the legends first gathered form in Wales or Brittany, but some of Arthur's greatest knights, as Gawain, Kay, Bedivere, no less than the king himself, were indubitably first known in Britain. There too, in Geoffrey's *History*, the legend first took literary shape; and other chroniclers, notably the poet Layamon (1205), followed in Geoffrey's steps. During the creative epoch, however, the vital center passes from England to France, and the splendid development of Arthurian romance in that country is a witness to the intimate union of imaginative life in the two great peoples who to-day, after long separation, have found one another again. Many of the romances were writ-

ten by Anglo-Normans, as much at home in England as in France; English influence can be traced throughout the stories in various interesting ways. But nothing of importance is written in the English language after Layamon till the late thirteenth century. From that time on, during the period of translation and transmission, a number of poems, mostly translations or adaptations from the French yet not devoid of original elements, show that the Arthurian tradition still lived or had been revived on Arthur's native soil. No genius of the first order arose, however, to treat the tradition, and it seemed as if Arthur were never to be adequately celebrated in his early home. One noble artist saved the day, and the *Morte Darthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, published by Caxton in 1485, closes worthily the long progress of Arthur.

As the study of Arthurian romance proceeds, the variety and scope of it becomes more and more impressive. Every decade unravels a little further the interweaving of the stories, penetrates deeper into the region of origins, and appreciates more clearly the reactions of historic circumstance. The most fascinating work is the investigation of sources. It leads back and back, till behind Geoffrey's Arthur fighting the Giant of Mont St. Michel rise all mythic heroes who have slain monsters of darkness, and the traits of Morgan le Fay are explained by her kinship to the Valkyrie, or the Irish war-goddess, the Morrigu. It is in Celtic myth and legend that the richest suggestions are found; yet the mind is impelled to peer toward yet farther horizons: Guenevere borne away by Meliagrance may be own cousin to Persephone in the courts of Hades; Gawain, waxing in strength as the sun mounts the sky, certainly suggests the large family of

sun-heroes; and Perceval, dumb and puzzled as the Grail passes before the bier of a king dying yet never dead, may assist at the mystic burial rites of an Eastern god of vegetation. Who shall say indeed that faint recollections of lost Atlantis may not gleam through the stories? Where vision fails and theories grow more and more tentative, fantasy, provided only that it refrain from confusing itself with scientific hypothesis, may play almost at will.

Just now, study has largely shifted from the alluring but precarious speculation concerning mythic origins, to a more sober investigation of literary relationships; yet the immemorial antiquity of many elements in Arthurian romance is beyond question. At every point of development, critical problems present their challenge to scholarship. But scholarship alone is competent to handle them, and direct literary appreciation can start its work only where research ends. Romance, for those who would study its abiding value to the spirit, begins when first it is written down. Knowledge of origins and connections is indeed a help to romantic emotion, always quickened by "old forgotten things"; but scholastic detail, once assimilated, would better be ignored by the seeker for beauty. Neither the historic nor the mythic Arthur rules our imagination, but the Arthur who held his sway in that many-towered mediæval Camelot which is still the capitol of a land of dreams.

II

Arthur and his knights then come to life for the first time in twelfth-century chronicle and verse. And the first striking thing about them is that they are emphati-

cally men of their day. Disconcerting fairy habits they do, to be sure, display on occasion, yet in the main they and the life they share reflect with extraordinary accuracy the varied aspects, material and psychological, of contemporary Europe. Mediæval romance, often assumed to swing quite free from bondage to fact, proves on examination to be a valid social document, and the reader who relates it to the period in which it was produced will gain a sense of reality which adds immeasurably to its charm. It can no more be understood without some knowledge of its background than Dickens or Thackeray can be understood without knowledge of the French Revolution or the industrial conditions of the Victorian age. Modern realism of course tries to establish a different relation between the image and the fact from any which consciously obtains in that world of romance; but the difference is less than we think. In relating either romances or novels to the civilization from which they spring, one must be on one's guard against the personal equation; yet the older writers, whatever wish they may have had to escape the actual, never succeeded much better than the moderns. For the best realism is not intentional but inevitable, and of inevitable realism old romance is as full as Arnold Bennett. The fairy mistress is arrayed in fabrics of no earthly weave, but the cut of her garments is frankly mediæval. Delectably impossible giants confront the trembling knight, but the elements that compose Their Monstrosities are usual enough: "His ears were those of an olyfant and his nose was cut like a cat." Imagination can attain a good distance from reality but it can no more fly away altogether than an aeroplane can escape the earth to which it must return.

For eyes that can see, the romances hold a whole revelation of their age. In their magic mirror are reflected the mediæval passion for pageant and pictorial beauty, for a life brave and fine in aspect however violently tragedy might threaten its peace. Racial distinctions are evident as the stories pass through a Germanic, an Anglo-Norman, a Scandinavian medium. The reaction of historic movements and events is strong: of the Norman Conquest, with its call to a new patriotism in England, of the Crusades, with their Oriental contacts, of the militant Religious Orders, picturesque beyond the capacity of invention, of the marriage of an English king with a princess of Provence. The unique and paradoxical code of honor, the satiric humor, the subtle sentiments, the brutal assumptions underlying exquisite manners, that baffle the student of the times, are all in its literature. Finally, the leading forces in the Middle Ages are the forces which create romance. Feudalism and Catholicism control those centuries. They also control the literature, which reveals them as they were seen by desire rather than by fact, and therefore reveals them with ultimate truth.

Perspective simplifies; looking back at the Middle Ages, their dominant moral trend is plain. The ideal of loyalty,—described by a modern philosopher, Josiah Royce, as root and mother of all virtues,—evolved an orderly Europe from the chaos of the Dark Ages, and governed the systems of feudalism and Catholicism as the soul governs the body. This virtue took different forms. At first, the leading types, beautifully illustrated in the clanging verse of the *Song of Roland*, were loyalty to God through His Church, and loyalty to the feudal Overlord. To these, in course of time,

another sentiment was added,—loyalty to the beloved among women. These three great loyalties,—religious, political, personal,—created in a very real sense what was best and most characteristic in mediæval life. They united to form the chivalric ideal. They are the true *dramatis personæ* of mediæval romance in general and of Arthurian romance in particular.

"The personal equation" was spoken of a moment ago. Another name for it is temperament, and there is quite as much temperament in the twelfth century as in the twentieth; but it appears in a different way. At times, an individual bias can be discerned. Separate poets are emerging from the confusion of mediæval letters, and in estimating their distinctive talents the critic has an easy task. The personal quality of Wolfram von Eschenbach for instance is as marked and as unrelated to the general tendencies of his age as that of Francis Thompson. But the larger part of mediæval literature is anonymous and composite, and the temperament it expresses is that of a whole age rather than of any individual author. For ages, like people, have temperaments of their own. No one man, but an epoch, wrote the Arthuriad; it is the expression of a corporate imagination, spanning centuries and acclimating itself in many lands. The collective character of the work is an obvious artistic handicap; but it is a peculiar asset also. Arthurian romance, retelling the same stories from the twelfth century to the fifteenth, not only presents the persistent factors in the Middle Ages as a whole,—and in no other epoch is continuity so strong,—it also suggests the gradual changes at work within seeming stability, and offers a priceless opportunity for analyzing a progressive ideal. The simplest way to understand its peculiar power is to follow

the great personages of the story. They do not develop in the modern sense, like a Maggie Tulliver, a Richard Feverel, but the work of successive ages can be traced upon them. Each mediæval author meant to preserve the types which he inherited; but he was impelled by all which divided him from earlier generations to introduce a new temper and to place his people in new attitudes. Few critical efforts demand more insight or reveal the evolving psychology of the Middle Ages better than study of the successive handlings undergone, for instance, by a figure like Gawain. Sometimes an archaic conception is gradually outgrown till a living man confronts one; again, the reverse takes place and a figure charmingly sincere in early days ceases to be a man and stiffens into a pose. All these changes,—and they are many,—obey progressive modifications in mediæval taste and instinct. To study romance is to watch the developing self-expression of mediæval life.

The composite character thus imparts to romance a social value all its own. It has also a special artistic power. It lends majesty and depth, for behind the conceptions as behind the fixed forms of mediæval art, can be traced the fervid life of a changing epoch, expressing itself through a persistent tradition. An analogy for the effect may be found in certain great rooms like the Cambio at Perugia, the Vatican Stanze, or the Lower Church at Assisi, where unity of conception endures on broad lines through an amazing diversity of thought and feeling and a long development in technique. Another parallel, though one to be suggested cautiously, is with Gothic architecture. The same period built the cathedrals and wrote the romances; and cathedrals like romances are the work of

many hands. To study the difference in feeling between the tale of Tristram in Gottfried von Strassburg and Malory, or the conception of Arthur in the *Mabinogion*, in Geoffrey, and in *Perceval le Gallois*, is as interesting as to compare the stained glass of Chartres and of Beauvais, the nave of Durham with the spire of Salisbury. In many cases, the changes presented are cognate. The finest period of the romances corresponds with fair exactness to the lovely Transition period; and the long generations during which the old romantic motifs were worked over to suit successive tastes, were those in which Gothic, too, tended to repeat itself, becoming at once more formal and more elaborated. Romance and architecture alike present the mediæval epoch as a whole and also the significant changes within the epoch.

CHAPTER II

EARLY ARTHURIAN ROMANCE ON BRITISH SOIL. MYTH AND CHRONICLE

I

BEFORE turning to the decorous literary opening of the Arthurian cycle, one book demands attention, produced on British soil though not in the English tongue. Through it we can look down a long vista to the age of prehistoric origins, when already the fantasy of primitive Celts was playing around the person and the court of Arthur. The series of Welsh tales known as the *Mabinogion*, found in a fourteenth-century manuscript known as the *Red Book of Hergest*, is a late redaction of early material. Five of the tales treat Arthurian subjects. Three of these, *The Lady of the Fountain*, *Geraint* and *Peredur*, are based on poems by Chrétien de Troies, though in *Peredur*, a strange version of the Perceval Grail-legend, barbaric traits are preserved unknown to the French poem, imparting a savage flavor to the aroma of the court, and the provenance has been questioned. The other two, *Kilwch and Olwen* and *The Dream of Rhonaby*, have no known models. They are pure detritus of myth,—myth no longer crystallized, yet sparkling even in its confused disintegration with the genuine light of early imagination.

Glimpses are obtained through these tales of a world where Arthur's prowess was magnified before ever the Normans conquered England, or the lessons of chivalry were learned. It is a pre-Christian world. Disquieting shadows oversweep it, from the fears and ardors experienced at the dawn of racial life. They come, they go, mingling with impressions from a later age. Chieftains with attributes of the gods their evident prototypes hold the center of the stage, dominating a rude society discernible through the web of fairy magic. No one has bettered Matthew Arnold's description of the stories: "The mediæval story-teller is pillaging an antiquity of which he does not fully posses the secret, he is like a peasant building his hut on the site of Halicarnassus or Ephesus; he builds, but what he builds is full of materials of which he knows not the history, or knows by a glimmering tradition, merely, stones 'not of this building,' but of an older architecture, greater, cunninger, more majestical."[1] One may add that of architecture proper, of plan, structure, symmetry, these stories are as guileless as are the actual buildings found among savage tribes. Their incoherence leaves in the mind a sense of pure bewilderment.

For the scholar, these stories are full of interest. They show the close affiliation of Arthurian tradition with old Celtic epic, and are an intricate example of interplay between civilized literary influences and primitive tastes and motifs. For the reader, their charm is in a sense adventitious. Charm they have, of barbaric color, of delicate sentiment mingling abruptly with fierce slaughter-lust, of romantic episodes charged with that illusion of which the Celt is always

[1] M. Arnold, *Celtic Literature*, p. 46, Macmillan, 1883.

master. But shapelessness and scrappiness relegate them to a category far below the splendid old Irish epics, or the best sagas produced during the Völkerwanderung.

At lowest reckoning, however, they offer an invaluable starting-point from which the student can estimate the transformation which the mediæval mind had to achieve. Here are familiar names: Kay, Geraint, —Chrétien's Erec,—Bedwi, and Gwalchmai (Bedivere and Gawain): and already Kay is crusty-tongued, Bedivere clings close to Arthur, and Gawain Arthur's nephew is "the best of footmen and the best of knights." But Kay "had this peculiarity,"—queer to encounter in the rough human seneschal of later days,—"that his breath lasted nine nights and nine days under water. . . . Very subtle was Kay. When it pleased him he could render himself as tall as the highest tree in the forest." Other attendants at Arthur's court are no less curious predecessors of his knights. There is he who if his way lay through a wood, went on the tops of the trees, and he who if he stood on the top of the highest mountain of the world, it would become a plain under his feet, and he who on the day that he was sad would let one of his lips drop below his waist, while he turned up the other like a cap over his head. More sinister are the sons of Gwawrddur Kyrvach, of whom it is baldly told: "These men came forth from the confines of hell"[1]; more suggestive of myth the splendid maiden for whom Gwythyr the son of Greidawl and Gwynn the son of Nudd fight every first of May until the day of doom. After that, companion tales cause no surprise when they present the very Prince of Hades, or the exquisite maid Blodwenn,

[1] *Mabinogion*, Everyman, pp. 100–107.

created out of "the blossoms of the oak and the blossoms of the meadow sweet and the blossoms of the broom." This last example shows that men were as sensitive to the beautiful as to the grotesque. The youth Kilhwch, starting like many a successor for the court of Arthur, is described in the conventional decorative style sacred to Celtic heroes. Yet manners are as primitive as personages. Perceval, like Kilhwch, was to ride straight up to the steps of the throne; but Kilhwch's threat, to set up three deadly shouts at the entrance to turn the hearts of women, is a habit happily discarded later. A distinct code of haughty honor is observed, but it is of pre-Christian type. There are startling hints of realism; a house in the opening of *The Dream of Rhonaby* might be any modern hovel in Wales or Ireland. But the stories as a whole are like a broken dream of ancient things. This is especially true of the quest in which many persons engage, including Arthur and his court: they are first to find the father of Olwen, then to perform the marvels he requires from the candidate for his daughter's hand. Here are met craftsmen wise as Weyland the smith, birds and beasts who keep the power of speech of which civilization is to rob them; shape-shifting, from animal to man, from one man to another. Old friends familiar in fairy-tale abound: the cruel stepmother, the magic cauldron, the ants who fetch the flax-seed needed to sow the barren field. The climax of the quest, the hunt of the great boar who has a comb between his ears necessary to shave the head of Olwen's very intractable father, is almost unmodified myth.

Arthur himself in these stories is already a great chieftain, surrounded by his followers; the surmise is tempting that he was once a central magnate in a

hierarchy of gods. But he recks not of past dignities and is as rude and hearty a host as any old Welshman. Lavish he is and joyous, true of his word and hard to withhold from any adventure going. A certain sense of fitness dawns in his comrades: Gwyn tries vainly to prevent him from entering a witch's cave, remarking: "It would not be fitting or seemly for us to see thee squabbling with a hag." This eager temper Arthur is to keep, for does not Malory tell how "all men said that it was merry to serve under such a king, that would put his person in adventure even as poor men do"? The future Arthur, however, is to retain only a few of the mythic properties in which he is now rich: his horse Cavall, his dog, his ship, his mantle; though he may retain his magic sword and his wife Gwenhwyvar.

Mingled with these unmistakably pagan elements are others, Christian and feudal. Arthur, coming to the shores of Ireland in wild chase of a king transformed into a swine, is met by all the Irish saints, who beseech his protection and give him their blessing. The strange juxtaposition is most evident in the stories presumably derived in parts from French originals, *The Lady of the Fountain*, and, above all, *Peredur*. Here, chivalric formalities alternate quaintly with primitive episodes and touches. On the whole, however, untutored childhood breathes through these tales. They are a spontaneous product of the mystifying contact of primitive man with this inexplicable world, and they are memorable to literature mainly because Arthurian romance to the end of the chapter never quite lost the haunting wonder and the sense of immemorial things which clings around the beginning of conscious life.

II

From no reasonable standpoint can much in the *Mabinogion* be considered literature; the stories contain traces of myth crumbling into fairy-tale and at a late stage in the process happening to get itself written down. The literary beginnings of Arthur's story must be sought, oddly enough, in those mediæval chroniclers who from a period before the Conquest to the end of the Middle Ages, represented scholarship. At once the historians and the journalists of their time, they looked out on the world, often from the shelter of monasteries, always from the point of view of the clerk, and, very dryly for the most part, chronicled its doings. Those living in England were likely when they looked back to mention Arthur: no fewer than two hundred of them allude to Arthurian matters, though in most cases they have little of value to offer.

A near-contemporary of Arthur, the chronicler Gildas, is first to tell of the Battle of Mount Badon, last of those "twelve great battles in the West" celebrated by Tennyson, in which the British defeated their Saxon invaders and won for their people a half-century of peace. But Gildas does not mention Arthur. It is in the compilation made by Nennius, about 826, that a brief notice, probably derived from a Latin chronicle of 697, tells how one Arthur, *dux bellorum*, fought these twelve battles, bearing on his shield the image of the Blessed Virgin. The passage may well date from an earlier time; and it tells all that can be even surmised of the historic foundation for the Arthur-legend. Arthur is here not yet king, simply a leader in war fighting with the kings of the Britons; but his fame already shines clear. That this

fame is almost from the beginning enhanced by fable would be plain if only from the protest of William of Malmesbury, perhaps cleverest of the chroniclers, who early in the twelfth century repeats the mention of Mount Badon, but gives also a glimpse of a full-formed Arthurian legend by alluding to the "deceitful tales and dreams" which on the lips of the Britons gather around Arthur. Of such deceitful tales the *Mabinogion* may be a specimen; and certainly its Arthur, irresponsibly seeking the blood of a witch or hunting a magic boar, has little likeness to the sober chieftain who according to William was the prop of his tottering fatherland and spurred the broken spirits of his countrymen to war.

Soon after William of Malmesbury, the memorable work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniæ* caught all the floating traditions about the historic Arthur, and gathered them in brilliant pages which gave Arthurian story at last the importance it has never lost. Geoffrey's book is the starting-point of Arthurian literature, and the irritation which it aroused in his contemporaries is doubtless one measure of its importance. As the word Monmouth implies, the chronicle still keeps near the borders of Arthur's native "wild Wales"; but Geoffrey, the probable Welshman, has become the vassal of the Norman conqueror. His work is an amalgam of elements from the primitive culture and the advanced civilization of his time, and these incongruous elements are smoothed to unity on the surface by the Latinized learning dear to the conquering race that had for seventy years ruled the English land. Geoffrey was a sophisticated and clever man of letters. Like others of the genus, he never attained distinction in the world of action; only three

years before his death was he made Bishop of St. Asaph's, an insignificant see which he never visited. Although he was long Archdeacon of Llandaff, he did not receive ordination to priest's orders until he was on the point of being consecrated Bishop; apparently his interest centered in literary work.

For it is Geoffrey's title to fame that he supplied the national epic craved by the sagacious Norman. The complex peoples living in Britain needed some unifying past if they were to find themselves as a nation. Geoffrey set out to supply it. He was audaciously eclectic in the sources from which he drew, scattered fragments of folk-tale, saint-legends, contemporary chronicle. Whether he relied also on a famous book by "Walter Archdeacon of Oxford," to which he sedately refers, or whether he was simply inventing the authority demanded by the honest mediæval dislike for original invention, may never be known.

The first necessity for a history of England was some sort of tie which should connect Britain with an older civilization; so after a few geographical notes Geoffrey begins straightway with Æneas and the close of the Trojan war, and with Brutus, the descendant of Æneas, who, guided by an oracle of Diana, arrived as an exile in Albion, "a land of pleasant aspect, inhabited only by a few giants." When once the tie with ancient days is firm, the chronicler proceeds to weave into his tale all the legends indigenous to the soil. It was probably agreeable to his Norman masters that when he came to the Saxon conquest he should narrate it from the British or Celtic point of view. Saxon glories could hardly be exalted for the descendants of the victors at Hastings, but the Celts had long

been safely submerged, and to give them a *revanche* in the story was a clever stroke. The counsels of strategy may well have been abetted by Geoffrey's Welsh blood; so, beginning with Hengist and Horsa, and steadily treating the Saxons as unprincipled invaders, he sweeps on *con amore* to the culmination of British glory in the magnified and magnificent career of Arthur. Race antagonisms are not stressed, however; all readers of whatever racial strain might unite in enthusiasm over the great champion of the soil, and, learning how under Arthur the land of Logres became the center of world-empire, glow with pride over a common past.

In this first complete version of the Arthurian story, interest and emphasis are primarily political. Geoffrey's Arthur is a fine soldierly figure, modeled on the type of Charlemagne, or of a Norman king. He conquers Saxons, defies Romans, and gathers round him a court wherein the new principles of feudalism begin to obtain. The old tone is not wholly lost; he is more interesting when he fights the Giant of Mont St. Michel *à la* Jack the Giant Killer, than when he harangues Roman ambassadors. But on the whole he inhabits a cultivated world and a learned century, and his oratory is carefully modeled on that of Livy or Sallust; for Geoffrey was a cultured gentleman, at home in his classics, and bent on showing that the ancient heroes of his land could make speeches with the best. The days of savagery are over, elaborate etiquette and fine manners prevail. Yet the romantic and human interest that were later to add charm to the tale, are still absent. If the land of faerie is to be deserted for that of chivalry, it would be pleasant to meet Tristan and Lancelot and Galahad. That

pleasure is denied. The stories in which the Middle Ages were to express the depth of human passion and the heights of mystic aspiration have not yet become fused with the Arthuriad, and Geoffrey's grave Latin chronicle, without an Iseult, without a Holy Grail, leaves the modern reader cold.

Yet the story is entirely coherent without these interests, though its unity is that of consecutive chronicle, not of organized art. Certain elements of romantic appeal are already present. Arthur is begotten of enchantment under circumstances of such full romantic quality that the birth-legend never needed to be either discarded or amplified when chronicle had blossomed into romance. In Geoffrey's pages, Merlin first weaves his spells, and the treatment of him leaves little to be desired; later versions of his legend, indeed, omit some delightful facts which Geoffrey records. When once the story gets started, however, it proceeds soberly and dully. Arthur, chosen king at fifteen years of age,—his birth being matter of common knowledge,—first subdues the Saxons, then the Picts and Scots to the north of him; then, after dividing Scotland among his brother-in-law Lot and Lot's brothers, he wins Ireland and Iceland, invades Norway, and spends nine years conquering Gaul. Returned at last to Britain, he gathers his vassals at Pentecost for a second, apparently imperial, coronation; in the description of this festival, the tastes and manners of the age of chivalry significantly appear. Feudalism indeed is presupposed in the whole story. Its courtesies are here, its ordered pomp, its military enterprises carried out, not by individual exploits as in Saga-times but by corporate and planned movements. During the coronation, comes the demand for tribute from Rome;

it is scorned in rotund speeches and it is followed by the Roman wars. These are interrupted by the news that Arthur's nephew Modred, son of Lot, has usurped the kingdom and married Arthur's apparently resigned wife, Guanhamara. The army returns to Britain; the great battle that resounds through romance is fought in Cornwall; Modred is slain, the queen retires to a convent, and Arthur, mortally wounded, is borne to Avalon to be healed. Of the knights to be Arthur's famous companions in the future, none appear, except Kay, Gawain, and the insignificant Bedivere.

It is surprising that this straightforward but rather tame story, in which the romantic portions are devoid of glamour and the seemingly historical passages are presented with a cold polish lacking in magnetism, should have expanded into the familiar Arthuriad in which all the forlorn hopes and abiding glories of mediæval ideals are mirrored. A wealth of romantic motifs to be sure is preserved in the frigid narrative, but these things are adventitious. Geoffrey's imagination is the pack-horse of his patriotism; he keeps the tone of authentic record at the expense of all free play of fancy, and his book is robbed of much spontaneity by its hybrid intellectualism. Yet by a twist of fate, it was his fortune to lay the basis for the structure in which later generations were to delight. His history was for centuries the most important work connecting Arthurian tradition with the British Isles. Is its indubitable vitality due to the national spirit in which it is conceived? Possibly; for romance, despite its characteristic indifference to the kingdoms of this world, often has its starting-point in love for the *patria*. The foundation of the Arthuriad is not the

guilty passion of Lancelot or the holy yearnings of Galahad; it is the ardent defense of British soil,—the exaltation of the British nation, by a king to whom all other interests are unknown.

III

Two chroniclers who follow on Geoffrey's lines,—Wace and Layamon,—keep the story near to England. Wace, a native of Jersey, writes in French; he is pure Norman, resident in Caen, although he had long prosecuted his studies in Paris. Layamon, a greater man, is first to treat Arthur's story in the English tongue, and a noble treatment it is. Wace follows Geoffrey directly; Layamon founds his work on Wace. Both writers are interesting because their spirit is that of poets rather than historians. Writing in verse and in the vernacular, their poems witness to the tenacious hold the story had at once taken on popular taste, and mark the transition from chronicle, written mainly perhaps for the literary classes, to romance, written for the bower and the hall. Moreover, the story, while unchanged in its main outlines, grows under their hands, gaining here and there important details and endowed in each case with an individual coloring.

Less important than Layamon, from an English point of view, Wace is also less interesting. Yet his *Roman de Brut*, supplanting perhaps an earlier version of Geoffrey by another Anglo-Norman, Gaimar, is infused with Norman gallantry and French sprightliness. Layamon says that Wace dedicated his *Brut* to Queen Eleanor, that romantic Provençal princess, wife of Henry II. to whom, more than to any one else,

England owed the introduction of the fervor and poetry of the South into its sober ways; and his book reflects the new influences. Knights are "right courteous" who in Geoffrey are merely "renowned for their prowess," and in Layamon, "dear-worthy warriors." Manners are finer than in Geoffrey. Arthur is not only proud and compassionate, brave, crafty, and generous; he "was one of Love's lovers. He ordained the courtesies of courts, and observed high state in a very splendid fashion." Geoffrey had already in his description of Arthur's second coronation, given the first full picture of mediæval pageantry, and of chivalric etiquette at its inception. Wace develops his predecessor's hints with zest; his vivid verse delights in the graces and delicacies of life. Already in Geoffrey, knights are wearing the colors of their ladies and fighting the game of war beneath fair eyes. In Wace, the tournament is in full glory, and feminine influence is more fully recognized: "The ladies of the court climbed upon the walls, looking down on the games very gladly. She whose friend was beneath her in the field, gave him the glance of her eye and her face, so that he strove the more earnestly for her favor." Matters have gone so far that "Cador, who was a merry man," complains that "peace and soft living are rotting away the British bone. . . . Soft living makes a sluggard of the hardiest knight. . . . She cradles him with dreams of woman. . . . May the Lord God be praised who has jogged our elbow." And Gawain replies, in words that imply a whole new range of feeling and ideals: "Lord earl, by my faith be not fearful because of the young men. . . . Merry tales and songs and ladies' love are delectable to youth. By reason of the bright eyes and the worship

of his friend, the bachelor becomes knight and learns chivalry."[1]

Some of Wace's enlargements are doubtless due to the fascination exercised on his fancy by the rising pomps of the new age. Some, however, must be attributed to the French strain in him. It is characteristic that he mentions the Twelve Peers among Arthur's knights. He can evoke a whole scene in low life with Gallic love for vital detail.

In every place you beheld squires leading horses and destriers by the bridle, setting saddles on hackneys and taking them off, buckling the harness and making the metal work shining and bright. Grooms went about their business. Never was such a cleansing of stables, such taking of horses to the meadows, such a currying and combing, shoeing and loosing of girths, washing and watering, such a bearing of straw and of grass for the litter, and oats for the manger. Nor these alone but in the courtyards and chambers of the hostels you might see the pages and chamberlains go swiftly about their tasks in diverse fashions. The varlets brushed and folded the habiliments and mantles of their lords. They looked to the stuff and the fastenings of their garments. You saw them hurry through the halls, carrying furs and furred raiment, both vair and the grey.[2]

Sentiment is at work also, introducing softer notes into the stern record of political events. When Arthur visits Scotland, in Geoffrey, the clergy, as the chronicle briefly mentions, come to him bearing relics of the saints and entreating him to have mercy on the land. In Wace, the religious assembly is accompanied by a pitiful company of ladies, "naked of foot, spoiled

[1] Wace, Everyman, *Arthurian Chronicles*, p. 73.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

of visage, with streaming hair and rent raiment, bearing their babes in their bosoms. These with tears and shrill lamentations fell at Arthur's feet right humbly, weeping, clamoring and imploring his grace"—true prototypes of the distressed damosels of romance.

Wace dwells at length on the Roman wars, while Layamon was to spend more time in proportion on events concerned directly with England. For the rest, he writes in fashion direct, honest, joyous, as befits a good Norman clerk. And he obviously means to stick to fact or at least to possibilities. It is to be wished that he had been a little more susceptible to the charm of incertitudes in the Arthurian story, and had confined himself less scrupulously to amplifying the plausible Geoffrey; for he has evidently heard more than he deems worth narrating, and the Arthur romance is well known to him. With critical sense as annoying as it is discriminating, he gives a capital account of what was happening,—an account which no modern scholar could better:

> The marvelous gestes and errant deeds related of King Arthur "have been noised about this mighty realm for so great a space that the truth has turned to fable and an idle song. Such rhymes are neither sheer bare lies nor gospel truths. They should not be considered either an idiot's tale, or given by inspiration. The minstrel has sung his ballad, the story-teller told over his story so frequently, little by little he has decked and painted till by reason of his embellishment the truth stands hid in the trappings of a tale. Thus to make a delectable tune to your ear, history goes masking as fable."

What Wace could not foresee was that to posterity fable might be more precious than fact, and grave historians

like himself and William of Malmesbury might be chiefly disappointing by the fidelity of their consciences!

Occasionally, however, Wace does deign to insert some new element of legend. His most precious addition is in the mention of the Table Round, unknown to Geoffrey, "ordained of Arthur that when his fair fellowship sat to meat their chairs should be high alike, their service equal, and none before or after his comrade." It is a piquant lingering of the historic manner that tells us how "at this table sat Britons, Frenchmen, Normans, Angevins, Flemings, Burgundians, and Loherins." We are still in the real Europe, not in that later land of pure romance where nationality has lost all but tenuous traces, and geography is ignored. Another interesting point is Wace's definite accusation of Guenevere. Geoffrey gives no indication whether her relations with Modred are voluntary or the reverse. In Wace, she is a willing sinner, and the few lines devoted to her give the first hint of the tragic figure, passionate, repentant, who is henceforth to play her part in the sorrowful pageant of the world's Queens of Beauty.[1] Again, it is in Wace that the Hope of Britain first shines indubitably clear. Already in Geoffrey, Arthur is borne to Avalon to be healed, but there is no hint of his return. It is left for Wace to tell the important tidings, that "he is yet in Avalon, awaited of the Britons; for as they say and deem he will return from whence he went and live again. . . . Merlin said of Arthur . . . that his end should be hidden in doubtfulness. The prophet spoke truly. Men have ever doubted and as I am persuaded will always doubt whether he liveth or is dead."[2]

[1] The text of Wace is so corrupt that assertions on this point are dangerous: but the statement above seems justified.

[2] Wace, Everyman, *Arthurian Chronicles*, p. 114.

The value of Wace is largely in the reflection he affords of feudalism; he stitches with bright Norman embroidery Geoffrey's sober mixture of Saxon and Latin weave. The value of Layamon is first and foremost in his genuine greatness as a poet.

To Layamon, personal power is at the service of a persistent racial tradition. He follows the general lines of Wace, his model, but his spirit makes his poem unique. He wrote in the opening years of the thirteenth century, at a time when Arthurian romance had already been enriched by all the resources of French fancy, and French elements are not lacking in his own speech, his vocabulary showing a large percentage of Latin words. Yet he is direct heir of the sturdy Saxon strain. An often quoted introduction narrates how his chief wish, as he lived his tranquil priest's life in his dear Church on the banks of Severn, was to tell the noble deeds of the English; what they were named and whence they came who first possessed the English land. England, English! They are words to conjure with!

It is partly because the poet uses the old alliterative line, as well as rhyme, and conforms to the laws of Old English accent and rhythm, that his poem seems so full of echoes from *Beowulf* and *Judith*. The strong swing of the measure, the rich and vigorous speech, transitional between Anglo-Saxon and the language of Chaucer, transmute Geoffrey's smooth narrative and Wace's ringing verse into a music more akin to the native genius of our people. Also, Layamon writes in the tone of Saga rather than romance. In Wace, the Britons drew "thick as rain from the woodlands and the mountains." But in Layamon, they "leapt out of the wood as if it were deer . . . and the brave

women put on them men's clothes, and they forth journeyed toward the army."[1] They are kin to Judith and Gudrun, these women: "Wheresoever they found any man escaped that were with Melga the heathen king, the women loud laughed and tore him all in pieces, and prayed for the soul, that never should good be to it. Thus the British women killed many thousands and thus they freed this kingdom,"[2]—all addition to the poet's original. The rehearsal of Arthur's glories has the ring of ancient lyric praisings, exalted, fierce and strong:

When Arthur was king,—hearken now a wondrous thing,—he was liberal to each man alive,—knight with the best, wondrously keen. He was to the young for father, to the old for comforter, and with the unwise wonderfully stern. Wrong was to him exceeding loathsome and the right ever dear. Each of his cup-bearers and of his chamber-thanes bare gold in hand, to back and to bed, clad with gold web. . . . The king held all his folk together with great bliss and with such things he overcame all kings, with fierce strength and with treasure.[3]

Have we here Arthur the flower of chivalry or Hrothgar the Generous? This Christian hero can fight like any Berserker:

Upcaught Arthur his shield before his breast, and he gan to rush as the howling wolf when he cometh from the wood behung with snow and thinketh to bite such beasts as he liketh. . . . Brake the broad spears, shivered shields, the Saxish men fell to the ground. . . . Some they gan wander as the wild crane doth in the moorfen, when his

[1] Layamon, Everyman, *Arthurian Chronicles*, p. 117.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

flight is impaired and swift hawks pursue after him and hounds with mischief meet him in the reeds. Then is neither good to him, nor the land nor the flood. The hawks him smite, the hounds him bite, then is the royal fowl at his death-time.[1]

The life echoing here was lived in Northern marsh and forest long before highly civilized Norman kings fostered the formalities of feudalism or fought according to the laws of chivalry. Is not Arthur's byrnie made by a "witty smith" who can be no other than the Weyland of Saga, though his name be corrupted into Wygar? Has he not named magic properties wondrous as any owned by Sigurd? Nor would any old champion have disowned his "gameful words." The sardonic brag, the savage threat, are here in full Germanic force; to Geoffrey's Arthur they would have seemed lacking in polish, but Heorot Hall would have hailed them with joy.

Other traits which the English love better to trace in their heritage are here also: the sense of fair play, the gravity, the moral stress, even the religious accent. When Arthur was hailed as Uther's heir, he "sate full still. One while he was wan and in hue exceeding pale. One while he was red and was moved in heart. When it all brake forth, it was good that he spake. And thus said he there right, Arthur the noble knight: 'Lord Christ, God's Son, be to us now in aid that I may in life hold God's laws.' "[2]

A Celtic delicacy blends with Layamon's Saxon feeling; the poet lives not so far from the Welsh border but that a fay can now and then whisper a man in the

[1] Layamon, Everyman, *Arthurian Chronicles*, p. 185.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

ear. No one else says that elves brought gifts at the birth of Arthur, no other has touched more exquisitely the departure to Avalon and the motif of the Hope of Britain. Merlin, whose weird form gleams faintly through the Latin veils of Geoffrey, here seems at once more human and more mysterious. Anguish precedes his prophecy: "Merlin sat him still a long time as if with dream he full greatly labored. They said who saw it with their own eyes that oft he turned him, as if it were a worm. At length he gan to awake, then gan he to quake, and these words said Merlin the prophet: 'Walaway, Walaway! In this world's realm, much is the sorrow that is come to the land."[1]

The most interesting Celtic survival in Layamon is the expanded story of the Round Table. It is he who narrates the quarrel in the king's hall which preceded the establishment of the Table, and so connects the tradition with the Irish story of the Feast of Bricriu. Here the Board is plainly a magic object, so built that though sixteen hundred men can sit at it, the king can easily carry it with him, "And then thou needest never fear to the world's end that ever any moody knight at thy board may make fight, for there shall the high be even with the low."[2] By Malory's time, the Table has become both smaller and more stationary! It has also acquired a Christian legendary character, having an occult relation, unknown to the chroniclers, with the Table of the Last Supper.

Apart from racial traits and survivals, Layamon has a quality all his own. The play of an original genius on an accepted model is everywhere evident. How full of sap, for instance, is the story of the feeble

[1] Layamon, Everyman, *Arthurian Chronicles*, p. 165.
[2] *Ibid.*, 211.

Constans lured by bad Vortigern to leave his habit for a crown, and the scene in the cloister when the ruse is discovered,—a scene ignored by Wace, to make room for splendor and military exploits. Human interest is strong in Layamon and an epic depth and grandeur mark his work. Yet in his very originality he is germane to his tradition. The slow movement, the weighty passion, the lingering on detail, the deep patriotism evoked this time less by locality than by race, are all elements in the poetic heritage bequeathed from Anglo-Saxon days. In this solitary version, Arthur is of the family of Northern heroes; this noble English poem celebrates an English king.

CHAPTER III

FRENCH VERSE ROMANCES OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

I

THE national spirit burns like an inward fire through the chroniclers who developed the central Arthurian story in England. With the almost contemporary verse romances which were celebrating Arthur's knights on the Continent, England had little to do. Yet these poems can not be ignored in the sequence leading to Malory; for to them was due nearly all that the word "romantic" usually means.

While Geoffrey and Layamon clung to a patriotic purpose which forced them to remain ostensibly within hailing distance of fact, romance was developing independently at its own sweet will. The Arthur of the French poets is not a militant monarch, defending his country and enlarging his empire, he is a monarch in position, seldom or never the subject of the story. Securely established on his throne, he makes his court the focus of all chivalric adventure. Thence issue, thither return, his devoted knights,—a Lancelot, an Erec, an Ywain, a Gawain, a Perceval. Attached to the king by a sentimental rather than a political tie, they are bound on quests in which for the first time may be breathed the full romantic air. The poems have no historic perspective and no epic scope;

they are episodic or biographical, interested in the careers of one or another hero rather than in the glories of the Land of Logres.

Layamon may be taken as a link between the saga world and the world of romance; these slightly earlier poets show us the separation already fully achieved. Northern Europe sang of Beowulf before it celebrated Arthur, and shared the sorrows of Sigurd while those of Lancelot were still unknown. It is important to notice how decidedly the twelfth-century romantic schools had broken with the tradition of the period of the Folk-Migration. "They imply the failure of the older manner of thought and older fashion of imagination represented in the epic literature of France."[1] To many readers, the *Story of the Volsungs* or the great songs of the Edda have a tragic sincerity which the graceful workmanship of the twelfth century can never equal. But to realize how inevitably the sterner stuff of epic crumbled into romance, it is only necessary to note the swift advent during that century of influences from the South and East. The Crusades were setting Europe in motion. They brought back along the great Provençal route stores of alluring tales, and knowledge of luxuries and amenities hitherto undreamed of. At the same time, from across the Pyrenees there stole into southern France strains of the soft music dear to the Arabians, and with them the conscious cult of beauty. In northern France, these influences encountered a Catholic civilization which had a latent respect for women, due in part to the heritage from Roman law and still more to the exaltation of a Mother ever Virgin. The resulting emotion gave women a higher position than they had ever known before,

[1] W. S. Ker, *Epic and Romance*. London, 1908.

insisted on viewing them, not as pets or mistresses but as saints and superiors, and tempered the hard light of a militant ideal by the tenderer radiance of woman-worship. So the chivalric attitude received its final enrichment, and a new mode of thought and feeling was given to the world.

In the South, the blending of these elements soon produced a lyric of rare sweetness and of a technical perfection never yet excelled. In the North, fighting ardors such as inspire the *Song of Roland*, were supplemented by sentimental graces and the passion of love. The stress in the Northern poets is still on action rather than on emotion; narrative rather than lyric thrives among them; but into the narrative enters the kind of experience which is soon to flower in the lovely verse of the *dolce stil nuovo*, inspiring a Cino, a Guido, or a youthful Dante. The lays sung to Iseult by Tristram, most accomplished of harpers, may well have been early models of *Donne che hanno intelletto d'amore*, and the feelings that shook the breast of young Lancelot in the presence of Guenevere can best be understood by reading the *Vita Nuova*.

Singers spring up on every side,—eager, and competent to transfuse old materials with the fresh feeling. The new ideals settle into conventions almost before they are recognized, so swift is their popularity. The poets find for themselves an instrument endowed with a new delicacy in the octosyllabic rhymed couplet, which in its fluid charm and natural magic has approved itself down the centuries from Chrétien de Troies to Chaucer and from Chaucer to William Morris; and the springs of romance poetry flow abundant, full, and sweet.

Yet it would be a mistake, as Professor Ker reminds

us, to seek in the poetry that has come down to our day the very fountainhead of romantic impulse. That poetry represents a late stage in the mediæval school. Behind it lies the minstrel tradition, but the minstrel has been succeeded by the man of letters, often attached to one definite center and writing for some special overlord. It "has come through the mills of a thousand active literary men,"[1] and abounds in formalisms and mannerisms. It is emphatically poetry of the court, not of the commons; the full sophistication of the age is in it and it carries choice workmanship and fine-spun analysis of sentiment to the farthest point of contemporary refinement. The whole body of romance presents an elaborated literary form, transcribed by clerks, meant for reading rather than recitation, though retaining many characteristics from the days, not so very remote, of oral transmission.

II Marie de France

One of the earliest of these Romance poets makes the situation perfectly clear. It is Marie de France, a woman singer. She dedicates her work to "that most noble and courteous king to whom joy is a handmaid, and in whose heart all gracious things are rooted." Whether the description be thought to fit or no, this monarch is supposed to have been Henry II. of England. And this is what she says:

I considered within myself what fair story in the Latin or Romance I could turn into the common tongue. But I found that all the stories had been written, and scarcely it seemed the worth my doing what so many had already

[1] *Epic and Romance*, p. 324.

done. Then I called to mind those Lays I had so often heard. I doubted nothing,—for well I know,—that our fathers fashioned them that men should bear in remembrance the deeds of those who have gone before. Many a one on many a day the minstrel has chanted to my ear. I would not that they should perish, forgotten, by the roadside. In my turn therefore I have made of them a song, rhymed as well as I am able, and often has their shaping kept me sleepless in my bed.[1]

And truly, again and again in Marie's brief story-poems can be caught the lyric quality of words meant for music. Such echoes become more rare as time goes on.[2]

The English connections of Marie's work are close. There can be little doubt that she spent a large part of her life in England, and every now and then an English word creeps into her pretty French. If she lived at the court of Henry II., she was at the very heart of the new feeling; for Eleanor of Acquitaine, Henry's queen, was the chief patroness in Europe of Courteous Love and all that appertained thereto. Troubadours frequented her presence; and the palace in the East End of London where she held court was center of the *Gai Science*. It is no wonder if Marie's poems open a world of tradition far different from that exploited by the chroniclers.

These poems are little tales, drawn, so she says, from Breton Lays. They are the closest representatives extant of true minstrel song, translucent and perfectly shaped as dewdrops. Only a few, from the dozen that

[1] *French Mediæval Romances*, Everyman, p. 1.

[2] The best manuscript of her works is in the British Museum. One theory makes her an illegitimate sister of Henry II., and in her later life Abbess of Shaftesbury. See *Eng. Hist. Review*, 1910, p. 303.

can be ascribed to Marie with fair certainty, have Arthurian connections, but these make it clear that Arthur is a well-known figure in her day. They tell of Sir Launfal and his fairy mistress, who awoke the jealousy of Arthur's queen; of Arthur's knight Guigemar, in his magic boat; of the lad Tyolet[1] son of the widow lady in the forest, and how he was bewitched with a knight-beast, and would fain go to court; of Tristan, carving a message for Iseult upon a hazel wand. As Mr. Mason says in the preface of his translation, "Marie's romances derive farther back than any Breton or Celtic dream. They were so old that they had blown like thistledown around the four quarters of the world," and the motifs they embody were to persist through the most intricate developments of romance, to the very end of the Middle Ages.

Yet these ancient and imperishable things are arrayed in delicate fabrics, gay with twelfth-century sheen. The touch upon them is feminine and French, it has prepared them for courtly use. Love-stories are Marie's stock-in-trade; already the new absorbing interest is established in a formal code of etiquette, and regarded as the prime duty of man or woman. Guigemar "perverted nature in that he cared nothing for love," and a knight seeking the favor of a hesitant lady, lectures her in a tone of severe rebuke to which her position of wife is quite irrelevant:

"Tis well enough for a light woman to make herself long entreated; it will increase her value to be thought unused to love. But the pure-hearted woman who is virtuous and of good discretion if she find a man to her

[1] This Lai is not surely by Marie.

liking ought not to treat him too haughtily before she consent to love him. Before any one should know or hear of it, they might have much joy together. Fair lady, let us end this debate."[1]

Sentiment, suddenly, is oversweeping the hard old fighting world; with it comes delight in all sweet breeding, in refined beauty, in gracious ways. The arts flourish and the world is gay: no wonder that ladies who live in chambers where frescoed walls record Love's gentle triumphs should yield to his blandishments!

The first room was the Queen's Chapel. Beyond this was the lady's bedchamber, painted all over with shapes and colors most wonderful to behold. On one wall might be seen Dame Venus, the goddess of love, sweetly flushed as when she walked the water, lovely as life, teaching men how they should bear them in loyal service to their lady. On another wall, the goddess threw Ovid's book within a fire of coals. A scroll issuing from her lips proclaimed that those who read therein and strove to ease them of their pains would find from her neither service nor favor.[2]

Fabrics tenuous and rich; fairy palaces of clouded green marble, maidens bathing rounded limbs in clear fountains paved with glimmering silver and gold,—such are the joys encountered, in the same century that sang of Roland at Roncevalles!

The sterner virtues, the clash of arms, the anguish of souls, echo but faintly here. Only brave knights, it is assumed, may win fair ladies—but their courage

[1] *Seven Lais of Marie de France:* Done into English by Edith Rickert, p. 21. Nutt, 1904.

[2] *French Mediæval Romances*, tr. by Eugéne Mason, Everyman, p. 8.

is no theme of Marie's. Good Catholics are they all: but as a rule the sentiment is as naïve as it is honest. In the *Lay of Yonec*, a lady imprisoned in a tower by a curmudgeon husband, is visited by a splendid knight who flies to her window in the guise of a falcon.[1] She has but one scruple in yielding to his will: is he perhaps no christened man? Granting the reasonableness of her fear, he reassures her by changing himself into her likeness and receiving the Sacrament at the hands of her chaplain, after which she gladly surrenders. Such things can happen in the delightfully unmoral, but unimpeachably orthodox world of Marie.

And for all the fairy glamour, it is a real world. Marie's verse is subtly close to twelfth-century life. To treat these little fairy-tales and love-stories as social documents may seem absurd; but their light touch reveals not only the fantasies that charmed the educated public, but also the civilization, fine, new, immensely pleased with itself, which was swiftly developing under the joint influence of feudalism and Catholicism. They show a society prepared to find the focus of its enthusiasms in the full chivalric ideal.

III Chrétien de Troies

Much said concerning Marie de France applies to her slightly later contemporary, Chrétien de Troies. Marie dedicated her works to the English husband of Eleanor of Acquitaine; Chrétien wrote at the court of the daughter of Eleanor by a French husband, the Countess Marie de Champagne. Wherever one strikes

[1] In a follower of Wace, the father of Merlin thus visits the nun his mother. The motif is a stock one, though not common in Arthurian romance.

romance poetry, traces of Eleanor's influence are likely to appear.

Chrétien, however, is a far more important figure than Marie, both in himself and in his relation to Arthurian story. He is the most significant author in the French romance-school, and the first to form and fix many phases of Arthurian tradition; he introduces many a hero dear during long generations to the European heart. Lancelot is first encountered in his *Chevalier de la Charrette;* his unfinished *Perceval* is in point of date the earliest written story of the Grail-knight; if it be true that he wrote a lost poem on Tristan he presented his public with nearly all the chief personages of future Arthuriad. In addition, he told the stories of several other knights whom the later prose romances unluckily ignored. His *Chevalier au Lion*, the story of Ywain, son to King Uriens, gives a picture of representative and almost ideal knighthood, while his *Erec* tells a fine tale which became popular enough to pass into a Welsh translation, whence Tennyson derived it, and retold it in one of the best among his Idyls, *Geraint and Enid.*

Marie belongs as much to England as to France, except from the point of view of language. But no English affiliations can be claimed for Chrétien. He is pure French through and through, in style, in feeling, in manner, and in substance. However, if England neither helped nor formed him, it is at least sure that he helped to form England; for there is evidence of the extent to which he was read and enjoyed there. Before the century was over, his stories had penetrated Wales and had blended in their sophisticated French form with the wilder, more primitive traditions still nursed in the land of Arthur's birth. Later, his best poem,

Yvain, was excellently translated in the north of England; and his stories had become part of the heritage and the capital of English poets.

It is not hard to understand his popularity, for there has rarely been a better story-teller than Chrétien. Marie presents a little tale whose demure sparkle is set with exquisite precision within the limits of a little scene: Chrétien makes us free of a whole untried world of gay adventure, wherein anything may happen and most things do. Here at last is the full stage for mediæval action, which is to persist through the time of Spenser and Tennyson. Here are satisfactory forests, so open in growth that knights following no road in particular can ride two abreast with ease. Here are castles, hermitages, chapels, towns none too frequent but pleasantly walled and turreted; a country sparsely settled, where occasional varlets may be seen tilling the land in the distance, but where as a rule knights errant and forlorn damosels have things all their own way. Here are enchanted bridges and magic basins, dappled palfreys, splendid armor, dungeons, potions,—in short, all the delightful trappings of romance which bewitched fancy down the generations: fresh, unhackneyed, for Chrétien's pages are the first in which their advent may be hailed. Let no one try to draw a map of this country, or to locate his scenes. His is no geography of earth.

As for the stories, they are the fine old ones that have the flavor of ancient things which the Middle Ages loved. As Gaston Paris points out, the *fond* of the adventures, almost always weird and astonishing, is derived from primitive pre-chivalric days. Ywain finds in the forest a golden basin on a tree and striking it evokes a magic storm, as savages still claim to do

by beating metal vessels. Lancelot and Gawain, seeking to rescue the stolen Guenevere, have their choice of reaching her by a sword bridge suggesting the edge feats of ancient Irish heroes, or by a second bridge of ice, under water, connected with other-world tales. With polite insouciance, as in old Saga days, differences develop between warriors, blood and brains flow swiftly, slaughter holds revel unabashed; suddenly the fight is settled, and the knight returns calm and cheery to his lady, to woo her in elaborate subtleties of speech and conduct, such as only an advanced civilization could invent. A new ideal of behavior, in part perhaps Chrétien's own creation, but mainly drawn from the growing life of the twelfth century, is engrafted on the old stories of barbaric, childish days. The contrast is piquant: it will last so long as chivalry is sung.

For through all his use of inherited material, Chrétien is seeking, how consciously one can, of course, not say, to render the spell of a new range of experience. His most ambitious work, the unfinished *Perceval*, is a clean-cut study that might almost be taken as a manual of knightly education. Taking an untutored boy of peasant up-bringing, but of king's blood, the poet instructs him by maxims, and records his training successively in manners, in arms, in love, in the forms of religion. The master's hand was stayed by death just as his hero seemed at the point of entering a deeper, more mystical region, remote from the bright externals of mediæval life; it was left for his continuators to brood baffled on the figure of Perceval at the Grail castle, and for a writer of another land and tongue to realize the rich suggestion of the incident. Chrétien's poem as it stands, like all

his other work, deals with the surface of life,—but how charmingly! *Perceval* apparently proposed to present in sequence all varying phases of knightly life; the other poems bring out several aspects of the same theme. Here is Ywain, the very noble knight, and the true lover, who nevertheless does very wrong and has to be severely punished, because, swept away by the love of adventure and fight he forgets his plighted word to his lady. Here on the contrary is Erec, diverted from manliness by overmuch fondness for his fair Enide, and recovering from his assotted sloth by means described with sly humor as well as true feeling. It is not easy,—such would seem to be the plaintive moral, presented with a twinkle in the eye,—to conserve the old virtues of valor in right balance with the fascinations of the new gallantry. Few knights can succeed in the exercise of a nicely adjusted *mesure*.

Chrétien's manner fits his subject admirably. Garrulous at times, always leisurely, it is often salted by the slightest possible flavor of Gallic irony, so that the sentiment does not cloy. The poet is keen and subtle-simple, as the French always are at their best; he is occupied chiefly, despite his good stories, with the feelings of his people; he is addicted in such an astonishing degree to analyzing the finer shades of sentiment that he has been claimed as a precursor of the seventeenth-century novelists. One need not go so far as this, but it is true that in Chrétien one strikes the modern literature of sentiment at its source. He possesses to the full the especially French gift of touching emotion without slipping into hysteria; he can present a fairly wide range of passion, yet never violate the social code of restrained good-breeding. *Mesure*, that precious mediæval quality, controls his work; the taste

can be trusted. Courtesy is the leading word; it is more stressed than passion, and the poems in consequence, with all their deftness in dissecting emotion, rarely pretend to sound the depths of life. One sighs but does not choke in reading of his lovers' sorrows; one smiles but does not exult when all goes well.

The style, like the treatment, is pleasantly unemphatic. The rhymed tetrameters ripple on with a sparkling fluidity all their own, and the very sense of leisure lulls. Grace is the chief characteristic; it is the style of the miniaturist, abounding in minute touches of soft clear color; images are vivid as the tints on a contemporary missal page. A better comparison is to the marvelous stained glass of Chrétien's period,—the transition period from the massive solemnity of the Romanesque to the restrained simplicity of the earlier Gothic. Mr. Henry Adams puts the matter admirably:

> The quality of this verse is something like the quality of the glass windows: conventional decoration, colors in conventional harmonies; refinement, restraint and feminine delicacy in taste. Christian has not the grand manner of the eleventh century, and never recalls the masculine strength of the *Chanson de Roland*, or *Raoul de Cambrai*. Even his most charming story, *Erec and Enide*, carries chiefly a moral of courtesy. His is poet-laureate's work [says M. Gaston Paris], the flower of a twelfth-century court and of twelfth-century French, the best example of an admirable language; but not lyric; neither strong nor deep nor deeply felt. What we call tragedy is unknown to it, Christian's world is sky-blue and rose, with only enough red to give it warmth, and so flooded with light that even its mysteries count only by the clearness with which they are shown.[1]

[1] H. Adams, *Mont St. Michel and Chartres*, p. 193. Washington, 1912.

IV

Yvain and *Erec* are Chrétien's masterpieces. They furnish an attractive picture of knighthood as it first charmed the world. But to readers interested in the development leading to Malory, another poem has yet greater interest. This is *The Knight of the Cart* where Lancelot, the hero who was by degrees to claim precedence over all others in the affections of Europe, first made his bow to the mediæval public.

The chief point of the poem is that it presents the feminine ideal of the twelfth century. Times have changed since the rough old days marked by such disregard of women as appears in *The Song of Roland.* Ladies have become perhaps the most important patrons of letters; minstrel and clerk must bear their tastes in mind if he is to succeed. It is usually women who clamor for perfect heroes, and it was a woman this time. Chrétien wrote his Lancelot at the request of Queen Eleanor's daughter, the Countess of Champagne, who evidently shared her mother's tastes. Perhaps the author wearied before the end of sketching a model being, for the work was finished by another hand, that of the clerk Godefroi de Legni. It is a mechanical and formal composition. Spontaneity and sparkle are almost lacking in it, yet it is interesting for it conveys more fully than any other extant story the new code of amorous behavior and the sentiment behind it. One fancies how the damsels of the court would sigh and smile, while the minstrel yawned, over this protracted study of the Lover in Position.

The theme, used by Malory in his nineteenth book, is the rape of Guenevere from the court by a certain

Meleagant, son to King Bagdemagus of Gorre, and her rescue by Lancelot. Traces of mythic origin have been found in it but as it stands the mediævalism is complete. The point is not the stealing of the queen, but the violation of knightly etiquette when the hero condescends to ride in a cart,—the vehicle in which prisoners were borne to execution,—in order to find and rescue her. It is difficult to sympathize with Lancelot's anguish over this necessity, yet for the aristocratic twelfth century the test was severe and his decision a triumph of the spirit over the letter of knightly honor. The tone of the romance is overstrained as in the heroic romances and sentimental novels of which it is the prototype; but the story is entertaining enough, and every now and then a passage occurs with a real thrill to it. Readers must have held their breath as Lancelot crosses a black and turgid water on a sword-bridge:

> He is going to support himself with his bare feet and hands upon the sword, which was sharper than a scythe, for he had not kept on his feet either sole or upper or hose. . . . He preferred to maim himself rather than to fall from the bridge and be plunged in the water, from which he could never escape. . . . He passes over with great pain and agony, being wounded in the hands, knees and feet. But even this suffering is sweet to him, for Love, who conducts and leads him on, assuages and relieves the pain. Creeping on his hands, feet and knees, he proceeds until he reaches the other side. Then he recalls . . . the two lions which he thought he had seen . . . but on looking about he does not see so much as a lizard. . . .[1]

The mingling of the real test with imaginary terrors

[1] *Erec and Enide*, Everyman, p. 309.

is in the finer spirit of romance. Bunyan's Christian was to encounter these same lions.

Safely over, the hero fights with Meleagant. It is a good fight, watched by handmaids of Guenevere, who have fasted and gone barefoot in their shifts three days in order that God might endue him with strength. At this point his name, hitherto artfully concealed, is told by Guenevere, who is looking on from a window. But when Lancelot hears her, he fixes his eyes on her and drives blows at random. He conquers Meleagant, however, and gets scant reward; for the queen treats him cruelly, when they meet. He is as confounded as the bystanders when she sweeps out of the room, vouchsafing him never a word. "His eyes would gladly have followed her had that been possible; but the heart, which is more lordly and masterful in its strength went through the door after her, while the eyes remained behind weeping with the body."[1] Before the reason for her behavior is revealed, long time elapses, Lancelot falls into fresh perils, and the reader can revel at length in Guenevere's remorse. When they are reconciled, the explanation of her severity is given. She was angry because Lancelot had hesitated for two whole steps before he got into that cart to rescue her! Fine-spun convention could go no further, nor the Manual for the Service of Ladies be more explicit.

The rest of the story is rich in elements that persist to the latest phase of the romance: the night-visit of Lancelot to the queen in the castle of Meleagant, the false accusation of Guenevere, based on a misunderstanding involving Kay. There is however no ordeal of the accused; only a tournament ended by the queen's acquiescence in the entreaty for peace of

[1] *Erec and Enide*, Everyman, p. 320.

Bagdemagus, a delightful old king, who, by the way, had later a whole romance to himself,[1] but who by Malory's time had retreated into nonentity. Lancelot disappears,—a disconcerting habit which he was never to outgrow; Gawain is discovered pluckily trying to reach Meleagant's castle by a bridge which runs under water, and is fished out half drowned; quests, imprisonments, rescues, jousts are furnished in lavish abundance. The poem supplies every delight demanded by the taste of the period except one,—a man at the heart of it; and perhaps the period had not learned to insist on that.

What it did insist on was a close study of every shade of feeling. Lancelot is the ideal exponent, not only of *L'amour Courtois*, but of the general chivalric attitude toward women, and the poem throws much light on later romance. Here for instance is an explicit statement of laws well to keep in mind when one follows knights and damosels in the forest mazes: "Sire," says a maiden, "I should like to accompany you for some distance . . . if you would agree to escort and conduct me according to the customs and practices which were observed before we were made captive in the kingdom of Logres." Here are the customs: "In those days . . . if a knight found a damsel or lorn maid alone, and if he cared for his fair name, he would no more treat her with dishonor than he would cut his own throat. . . . But if while she was under his escort she should be won at arms by another who engaged him in battle, then this other knight might do with her what he pleased, without receiving shame or blame."[2] It is

[1] *Le Brait de Merlin.* Bagdemagus is the last person to hear the voice of the imprisoned Merlin.

[2] *Erec and Enide*, p. 286.

evident enough why damosels so habitually show a passionate reluctance to be won!

But of course it was by the ideal presented of perfect love that the poem caught the fancy of the age; and one can still catch the aroma which was to perfume poetry and fiction for many a century. Ridiculous as Lancelot may seem, his attitude really means something. His obedience when bidden by the queen to "fight his worst," becomes impressive, when one realizes what such self-control would cost an age new to the code of ladies' gentle service. With all its quaint artificiality, there is a touch of genuine religious fervor about the emotion. When Lancelot, leaving his lady's room, "bows and acts precisely as if he were before a shrine," the whole spirit of *L'amour Courtois* as an institution is conveyed. It is the spirit far more beautifully expressed by the early Italian and Provençal poets:

Beneath thy pleasure, lady mine, I am[1]:
The circuit of my will,
The force of all my life, to serve thee so:
Never but only this I think or name,
Nor ever can I fill
My heart with other joy that man may know.
And hence a sovereign blessedness I draw,
Who soon most clearly saw
That not alone my perfect pleasure is
In this my life-service:
But Love has made my soul with thine to touch
Till my heart feels unworthy of so much.

[1] Pannuccio dal Bagno, of Pisa, Tr. by D. G. Rossetti. *Poems and Translations*, p. 225, Oxford University Press.

Without almost, I am all rapturous
Since thus my will was set
To serve, thou flower of joy, thine excellence:
Nor ever seems it anything could rouse
A pain or a regret
But on thee dwells my every thought and sense.
. . . . . .

Lady, since I conceived
Thy pleasurable aspect in my heart,
My life has been apart
In shining brightness and the place of truth
Which till that time, good sooth,
Groped among shadows in a darkened place
Where many hours and days
It hardly ever had remembered good.
But now my servitude
In thine, and I am full of joy and rest.
A man from a wild beast
Thou madest me, since for thy love I live.

With such patient deference, with such awed rapture, Chrétien's Lancelot might have spoken. The attitude seems alien to-day; *L'amour Courtois* and Feminism do not speak the same language. But all the world loves a lover still and even a feminist age may understand why the perfect lover gradually took precedence of all other characters in mediæval affection.

CHAPTER IV

FRENCH VERSE ROMANCES (*Continued*)

I

THERE were other twelfth-century poets dealing with Arthurian story, quite as important as Chrétien or Marie. One of them, Bréri, Bledhericus, or Blihis, is dimly known or rather inferred from scattered allusions. The earliest form of the Grail story can perhaps be traced to him; he seems to have had a wide reputation for his knowledge of traditions about British heroes. Bréri is, however, a very hypothetical personage, hardly a name, if that; but there are several poets whose work has survived in fragments sufficiently long to show their quality.

Two of these poets told the famous story of Tristan and Iseult, and their work might compare favorably with that of Chrétien had it not come to us in so mutilated a condition. Each was evidently a man of distinctive temperament and interesting gifts. Both are connected with England; Béroul, the earlier, was almost certainly an Anglo-Norman; Thomas, the finer spirit, whose verse by internal evidence would be assigned to a somewhat later date, was probably so. Both present a far nobler version of the great love-story than that on which Malory unfortunately leaned. Béroul may, however, be considered to inaugurate the

form developed in Malory, for the story as he tells it is placed in the days of Arthur and connected with the Arthurian court. His Iseult appears before the assembled Table Round, swearing on the relics of the saints that she is innocent in her relations with Tristan. In Thomas, on the other hand, the story is placed some generations after Arthur's time; and the great king and his knights have become legendary names to conjure with.

Behind both these poets lies a long development of the story; a German poet, Eilhart von Oberge, may for once suggest the most primitive tradition better than these Frenchmen do. Interesting primitive traits linger, however, in both Thomas and Béroul, especially in Béroul. A naughty dwarf betrays the fact that Mark,—whose name means "horse" in Cornish,—is the possessor of horses' ears. Isolt abides in no stately palace, for the brook to which Tristan trusts his messages runs straight through the women's apartments, evidently conceived as a group of rude huts similar to those described in Celtic epics. The Morolt, with whom the young Tristan fights for the truage of Ireland, is, as his name implies, originally a sea-monster; though in the extant versions he has evolved into the brother of the queen of Ireland, and in Malory has become a decorous knight, Companion of the Table Round! Apart from these traces of origin, the Béroul version as it stands has a wilding flavor. 4485 lines survive, dealing with the central portion of the story, in which the rescue of Isolt from lepers, her life with Tristan in the forest of Morrois, her return to Mark, and her swearing her innocence by an oath ingeniously false yet true before the Table Round, are the most prominent features. The poem may be the work of

two hands. One of them, responsible for the earlier part, was probably a jongleur; for there are signs that the verses are meant for oral recitation rather than for reading. The work is uneven and powerful; vengeance intoxicates,—Tristan appears exultant before Isolt with an enemy's scalp in his belt, like the wild Pict he was,—and cheating is celebrated with enthusiasm. No subtle psychology such as delighted Chrétien or Marie appears in these rude verses: on the other hand, they are picturesque, and not lacking in humor. The description of the life of the lovers in the forest of Morrois, especially, has a touch of poetic realism. They suffer from hunger and cold, they eat roots, they grow tattered and wan, they are entirely happy. Alas! In later centuries they both become more used to courts and would not enjoy this exile. Here on the other hand it must be confessed that the sentiment is hurt by the matter-of-fact prominence given to the fact that they are bewitched; for in three years the effect of the potion wears off, and surprised at themselves, they accept with docility the advice of a hermit that Isolt return to her legal lord! The use of an English word, "lovendrinck," is by the way an interesting hint that the home of the story is in the British Isles.

Where Béroul is somewhat coarse, violent, and occupied with externals, Thomas, his slightly later contemporary, gives the full sentimental blossoming of the story. 3140 lines are extant; they include a few broken fragments, and the long ending of the tale, through the great final scene where Isolt of the White Hands falsely reports to the dying Tristan that a black sail indicates the refusal of his love to come to him, and he yields the breath just as the true Isolt enters

the room, to die upon his body. It is a pleasant problem to discuss whether behind this version lies a primitive poem, or merely a confused episodic tradition. By clever and close reasoning, M. Joseph Bédier, an expert student of Tristan material, decided on the first hypothesis; Gaston Paris, the master of Bédier, thought that this poem might have been written in England; but the whole supposition is too hypothetical to stress.[1] M. Bédier has given a brilliant imaginary reconstruction of the supposed poem, based on Thomas and other romances. He has also written a charming free version of the story, in which he uses at will any accessible material especially the exquisite middle high German poem of Gottfried von Strassburg. This version, translated into English by Hilaire Belloc, is an easy way for English readers to become familiar with the finest things in the old tale.

In the authentic work of Thomas, a courtly grace has supplanted the primitive tone of Béroul. Thomas sounds also a genuine note of passion; his lovers need no code of Courtly Love to teach them how to behave,—long before Eleanor of Acquitaine or her daughter amused themselves with Courts of Love and sentimental dilemmas, these two have been intimates against their will of the Lord of Terrible Aspect. It is by an odd lapse of taste that Thomas represents Mark as well as the lovers, as drinking the fatal potion. But in spite of this lapse, the enchantment, delicately recorded, is never intruded. It does but seal our sympathy with the lovers by its suggestion of the irresistible force to

[1] It is ably discussed by Miss Gertrude Schoepperle, who argues that the primitive poem was more nearly represented by Eilhart von Oberge, 1185–89. She thinks the poem can not have been as coherent as M. Bédier implies.

which they yield. Direct heart-break throbs through the verses. We feel it when Tristan sings before Isolt of the White Hands the misleading song:

> "Iseult ma drue, Iseult m' amie,
> En vous ma mort, en vous ma vie."

We feel it yet more in the closing scene, where he dies, calling three times on the beloved name, while the futile ship with its white sail comes swiftly toward him, and Isolt of the White Hands takes her silent vengeance. The briar and rose that spring from the lovers' graves[1] are precursors of many sympathetic growing things, which are to adorn the tombs of hapless lovers down the centuries.

Beauty and color are not lacking in Thomas's work. Tintagel, for instance, is lovingly described; its towers are the work of giants, its walls are chequered with sinople and azure, its quarrels are of marble. Love of the arts appears in an interesting episode, where Tristan, chief harper always among knights, plays for the nonce the role of sculptor. With the help of a giant whom he has subdued in the forest, he builds a secret place, where he makes statues of all the personages in the story, including Brangwaine, the hand-maiden, and Petitcru, the little magic dog which changes color like the rainbow! The ladies bear perfumes in their breasts; they are tinted with the tints of life; gazing upon them Tristan forgets his woes.

Yet there lingers in Thomas, with all his modernity, something of the manner of the trouvère,—robust, elaborate, but slow. A gravity often sad overshadows his work. In another light, he may be said to have

[1] Not however in the original Thomas.

affiliations with the chroniclers. He seems to have leaned on Wace in portions of his narrative; and he goes out of his way to praise the land, with as fervid and apparently as patriotic an emotion as any would-be historian of them all: England, to him, is "a country great, and blessed of God, fair and illustrious, productive of all good things, rich in courteous knights, in strong castles, in great forests where birds and wild beasts wait the hunter, well provided with metals, silver, precious stuffs, and many furs." London does not escape his praise:

> "Londres est mult rich cité,
> Meilleur n'est en Chréstienté;
> Plus vaillante ni mieux preisiée,
> Mieux garnie de gent aisieé;
> Moult aiment largesse et honur."[1]

As for the people, this *gent aisieé*, he can not say too much of "the franchise and courtesy of the noble people who inhabit this kingdom, and who receive with so much honor and friendship the distinguished men who come there from strange lands."[2] Had the poet himself been one of these "distinguished men"? At all events, Bede himself, to say nothing of Geoffrey, could not praise England more enthusiastically; and such passages certainly go to indicate that his poem was probably destined for an English public.

The Tristan-tale, as will be seen later, was sadly degraded before the days of Malory. Meantime, one other French or Anglo-Norman poet with intimate English connections must not pass unnoticed, though

[1] Thomas, *Le Roman de Tristan*, i., l. 2651. Ed. J. Bédier, Paris, 1902.
[2] *Ibid.*, ii., p. 40.

he comes at the end of the creative epoch and his work to some minds bears marks of decadence. The name of Robert de Borron will always be associated with the romances of the Holy Grail. He is responsible for the most audacious amplification undergone by Arthurian legend. His trilogy,—*Joseph of Arimathea*, *Merlin*, *Perceval*,—was a bold attempt to follow a consecutive scheme, which began at Jerusalem and ended at Avalon, spanning the centuries from the period of the remote ancestors of the Arthurian characters, to the achievement of the Grail-Quest. Only broken fragments of De Borron's work survive, and portions even of these may be a redaction; but his general plan and spirit are well known through long prose romances based on him.

It is better to defer consideration of the plan till the time comes to discuss these romances. But the importance of his contribution to the Arthuriad should be signaled at once. He is an entirely evasive figure. No one knows who he was or where he lived, though some recent theories, contradicting the earlier, make him an Englishman. He is supposed to have been a knight, perhaps "a pious trouvère, the friend of ascetics"[1]; but the soul of the contemplative breathes through his invention, and the idea is hard to avoid that he reflects the cloister rather than the world. His keen interest in stories that smack more of saint-legend than of chivalry, the liturgical strain that pervades him, above all his free use of esoteric suggestion, lead into a new region, remote from ordinary romance. Most critics, seemingly repelled by the more ascetic phases of mediæval feeling, do him scant justice, and the hour for a full and sympathetic study

[1] Hucher, *Le Saint Graal*, vol. i., introduction.

of him has not yet struck. It will strike in time; for his work signals a notable fact,—the advent of Christian mysticism in Arthurian literature. To the love of ladies and to loyalty toward the Overlord, is now added the third great element which completes the harmony of mediæval life; and to-day, when the significance and value of mysticism are recognized as never before, a poet of the Holy Grail must surely come to his own. The fragmentary character of de Borron's work makes it difficult to hazard estimate of his style or poetic quality. Probably his value was that of spirit and substance rather than of form. But however deficient in the charm of Chrétien or Thomas, he must have been a great man, perhaps a great initiate. His trilogy was the foundation of the expanded scheme, which included all the previous interests of the Arthuriad, but which saw in the story also a religious parable, an epic of spiritual opportunity offered and lost. In him or his followers, chivalry enlarged its borders to comprise adventures more elusive than earth could furnish: as Chrétien gives feudalism at its brightest so de Borron gives Catholicism at its most intense.

De Borron carries us into the thirteenth century. So do the German poets whose work is the crowning glory of mediæval literature before Dante: Gottfried von Strassburg and Wolfram von Eschenbach. Each gives a color all his own to the Arthurian material he handles. To Gottfried, building on Thomas, it was given to enshrine the tale of Tristan and Iseult for all time in a jeweled sanctuary. It was the part of Wolfram to create the most searching, spiritual and at the same time human version of the Grail-Quest; for his *Parzival*, while not integrated with the whole Arthurian development as are the Grail-poems of de

Borron, is in itself a noble achievement. Neither of these poets, however, was original in the sense of presenting new material; and so far as can be told, neither was known in England. They lie therefore outside the scope of this book, except as inevitable comparisons suggest themselves from time to time. The case is different with the French poetry at which we are glancing. Much of that was written, as has been shown, by subjects of the English kings; many portions show clear traces of English patriotism, religious or secular, and are influenced by English tradition; and the whole body of it had for centuries a popularity in the British Isles greater than that of any works written in English. If one wishes to apprehend the imaginative life of mediæval England, so far as it was formed by romance, one is forced to be cognizant of French romance-poetry. Marie, Chrétien, Béroul, Thomas, de Borron, all helped to create Malory's background; and while a close study of these writings would here be out of place, a little knowledge of them, and some slight further attempt such as will now be made to characterize their temper and achievement, is a necessary prelude to any intimacy with romance-development in Britain.

II

In seeking a general estimate of these romance poets, one is first confronted by the fragmentary character of their work. This is due to more than the loss of manuscripts in the long drift down the ages. Again and again, the mediæval poet failed to finish his task. Gottfried's masterpiece, the *Tristan and Iseult*, had to be completed by other hands. Chrétien's *Perceval*,

which was certainly carrying him out of his depths, was left unfinished, attracted continuators who dragged the tale into wild regions unknown to the original plan, and might have been continuing to this day through ever-new thousands of couplets, had death not mercifully intervened. Among chivalric traits, the one most akin to the Hellenic sense of proportion is the fine quality called *mesure*. This quality the poets could appreciate in life but they had no perception of it in their art.

One cause of the defect is the minstrel tradition which persists even in the most literary form of the court poetry. Days and evenings were long in the castles, and that was the most welcome tale which never drew to an ending. Catchwords too, and padding, were convenient when memory or invention failed. The copiousness of speech appals anyone who notes it in current conversation; it infests these poems. Style, the Middle Ages from the first valued and cultivated, but theirs were in the main artificial devices, sometimes allied to mnemonic tricks, such as mark half-primitive minds, rather than the instinctive unity between word and thought, cadence and theme, which marks the masters. Throughout these poems the shaping artistic instinct, selective and severe, is in its infancy. An early stage of art-development may produce perfect lyrics, as Provence and Sicily prove. But narrative follows other laws. It is beyond the grasp of these men, who show no sense either for epic progress or for dramatic unity. A single poem rarely possesses a central theme. The adventures of the knights are presented in gay confusion, for what the poet enjoys is sheer linear narrative, in which consecutive episodes are cherished for their own sake, not

because they converge to a focus. In the *Yvain*, for instance, which is one of the most direct among the stories, the plot proper,—a fairly good one,—is suspended about line 2800, to be resumed at line 3525, dropped between 3770 and 4315, and 4635 to 6530. The title-interest, the pleasant relation of this twelfth-century Androcles to his lion, has nothing to do with the story.

In the poorer poems and in the poorer portions of better work these tendencies are fatal. Chaucer's amusing *Sir Thopas* fairly imitates their feeble tom-tom beating, their pointless conventions. These same defects, all too evident even in vital portions of the greater writers, keep them from attaining the highest place in letters; they go far towards justifying the severe judgment of Matthew Arnold. "It is all gone, this French romance poetry," says Arnold, "only by means of the historic estimate can we persuade ourselves now to think that any of it is of poetical importance."[1]

But it is not all gone, as the revival of pleasure in these poets conclusively proves. The simplest of tests to determine their worth is the truest; now that they are becoming accessible in graceful and adequate translations, old and young read them with delight. Arnold's contention may be granted that Chaucer transcends this poetry through a superior sense for reality and a more incommunicable charm. Chaucer is a greater poet than any earlier man in France or England. But this is no reason why the earlier work should be tossed aside. Little stars may shine with as authentic a light as big ones, and Lesser Celandines may be cherished without disparaging the rose.

And as for the historic estimate, the modern attitude

[1] M. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, ii., p. 26. Macmillan, 1898.

places an increasing value on it. True, the greatest poetry must enshrine primal and enduring emotions; but the fleeting and the vanished have their charm, and the record of them is cherished, more than the severer standards of pre-evolutionary times allowed, as the flux of life is realized to be life's only revelation. In other words, the social aspect of literature is more and more appreciated, and in the very limitations imposed on poets by their period can be found a precious human value. The natural mind enjoys the weakness as well as the strength in the twelfth-century poets. The adventures which they narrate may lead nowhither; they do something better, for they "startle and waylay." Reading them, we "recapture the first fine careless rapture" of a day long dead, when romantic love for women and mystic spiritual passion shone from a new East over a world somewhat stark and grim.

An air of discovery imparts permanent value to the poetry of the earlier Middle Ages. It does not matter that the stories told are ancient; the filmiest verdure appears in May upon the oldest trees. Nobody was original in the modern sense till after the time of Shakespeare. To us, originality implies new invention; to the mediæval mind it inhered rather in the best telling of a fine old thing. We too can care for the racial memories that play through the poems. Their charm lies in the union of a haunting suggestiveness with a spirit of immortal youth. These poets are in love with life, the life of their own time, rich in half-understood recollections; and they are able to communicate this supreme passion to their readers. The brave world which allured Scott, Tennyson, Coleridge, Rossetti, lives in the pages of early romance-poets,

as nowhere else. Its aspects, its emotions, its aspirations all are here.

Not of course that romance reflects mediæval life in its wholeness. Its point of view is frankly aristocratic, for one thing, and history and other arts must be consulted to learn that experience of the common people, so gayly ignored by the poets. These are dreams, and partial dreams at best. Still, men are known by their dreams; and the common people, if they do not figure in the dreams, certainly loved them.

Perhaps the most striking fact in the social revelation of the romances, is the witness they bear to the delight of the age in visible beauty, "Simple, sensuous, passionate": the second adjective in the famous description is as well deserved by Marie de France or by Wolfram as by Keats himself. Beauty is the lord of the hour, and every page is aglow with it. This æsthetic instinct is felt, not in sweeping landscape, in broad composition; rather as through contemporary illumination, in the exquisite and rich use of concrete detail. "King Arthur had a scepter brought which was very fine. Listen to the description of the scepter, which was clearer than a pane of glass, all of one solid emerald, fully as large as your fist. I dare to tell you in very truth that in all the world there is no manner of fish or of wild beast or of man or of flying bird that was not worked and chiseled upon it with its proper figure."[1] No wonder that when this scepter was handed to the king, he "looked at it with amazement." A comb of gilded ivory lies casually by the wayside, to which cling golden hairs of Guenevere; a bed invites repose, covered with a yellow cloth of silk and a coverlet with gilded stars. The scenes of feasting, described with

[1] *Erec and Enide*, p. 89.

endless zest, are not wholly gross; pleasure is felt not only in the good food, but in the gilded silver drinking cups, in the color of the white wine and the red, in the richly embroidered towel, white and clean, in the large twisted candles that join with the starlight to make the illumination brilliant. When Erec weds his Enide, the king and queen sit on two thrones of white ivory, well constructed and new,—there was no part of wood, but all was of gold and fine ivory. Well were they carven with great skill, for the corresponding sides bore the representation of a leopard, and the other two a dragon's shape.[1]

The marvelous decorative detail with which these pages glimmer, reflects the period of the first Crusade: that brilliant age when a new passion for pomp and beauty overswept the world from Byzantium and the East, swathing civilization in rainbows. Many objects are fortunately still preserved which help us to visualize romance. Thrones like those in *Erec* may still be seen, with strange Lombardic beasts couchant beneath them. Old ivories abound in museums,—wonderful ivories from the very period of the romances, which though worn smooth have resisted the ravages of time better than wood or stone. They show the game of chess, the tournament, the Tower of Chastity whither a knight climbs to win the first kiss from his little lady. Romanesque carving round church portals, ancient textiles preserved in dusty sacristies, serve to make the romances real. On the other hand, one

[1] These elaborate descriptions became so popular that there was a reaction against them. Chrétien, says Professor Ker, asserted his delicate and individual taste in giving Enide an ivory saddle carved with the story of Dido, instead of Oriental work, and embroidering Erec's coronation robe with figures drawn from Macrobius.

turns with pleasure from the worn splendors of the objects themselves, to the poems where they shine ever fine and new, the properties of an age when the minor arts flourished with unique variety.

One could multiply endlessly examples of the rich response of the romances to the outward aspects of life. These jousts which glow like sunset, these solemn processions, this ceremonial which accompanies all life's high moments, suggest an amazingly picturesque world. Not that there is conscious effort at fine descriptive writing; the poet so reveled in these things that naturally he made them live before the eye. Such scenes as the Grail-procession in Wolfram's *Parzival*, the "love-grotto" to which Tristan and Iseult betake themselves in Gottfried, are among the most vivid pictures in literature. The later Middle Ages can not equal them, the Renascence can not excel. The wholesome delights which the poems register are to survive as long as chivalry itself. Spenser's Sir Guyon knew them:

> "Faire shields, gay steeds, bright arms, be my delight;
> These be the riches fit for an advent'rous knight."[1]

But life in other than superficial aspects appears in these pages. Beneath, beyond the pictures lies the range of mediæval emotion,—baffling, alluring. Feelings, like manners, are at once gross and fine. A sudden flash of delicate perception will illumine most unexpectedly a gross episode; a conflict of elevated impulses will develop out of a fierce and violent situation. Chivalry in these poems is not yet quite certain of itself; it is still a little tentative, very pleased with each new bit

[1] *Faerie Queene*, book ii., canto vii., 10.

of control it learns to exercise over natural passion. Two types of experience are hurtling, like two knights in a tourney. The result is frequent paradox, and real analytical power in treating moral and emotional complexities.

Not that this poetry is strong in delineating the supreme passions. These are often assumed rather than rendered. With one or two exceptions,—the potion scene in the best versions of the *Tristan* for instance,—there is nothing in twelfth-century literature which pierces and haunts like the laugh of Gudrun, or the cry of Hervor when she calls on her father's spirit to give her the sword of vengeance out of his grave. It is on the finer shades of experience that the poets spend themselves. The "gentle heart" has discovered itself and is exploring its own mazes. Even in Marie, there are pathetic passages as where that early Griselda, La Freine, adorns her rival's bed with her most cherished possession, the silk in which she was wrapped as a baby. The later poets are never weary of dwelling on the devious mysteries of emotion. They delight in moral dilemmas, where introspection has to be active; for knightly conduct is no plain matter of obvious obedience, it involves nice distinction, difficult choice. People are repeatedly racked by conflicting duties, and their decisions are triumphs of delicacy and self-knowledge.

Lancelot for instance is proposing to show mercy on a defeated knight when a damosel rides up and demands the knight's head. Then he

> is in a predicament as he thinks and ponders over the question: whether to present to her the head she asks him to cut off, or whether he shall allow himself to be touched by pity. . . .

Generosity and pity each command him to do their will, for he was both generous and tender-hearted. But if she carried off the head, then will pity be defeated and put to death, whereas if she does not carry off the head, generosity will be discomfited. Thus . . . he is tormented and spurred on by each of them in turn.[1]

In such quaint puzzles the authors revel; the etiquette which is to prevail through the palmy days of romance is developing; the chivalric code grows under our eyes,—no formal set of rules, but a vital ideal of conduct, allowing scope for individual choice, shaping its standards as need arises. And the excitement of action, vigorously sustained though it be, falls into second place beside the excitement of this new pursuit,—the exaltation and the guidance of feeling.

Character is less developed than sentiment in this poetry. The art of portraiture is still immature. Types broadly and strongly drawn abound,—often they were probably already fixed when the poets took up the tradition. Kay is always crusty, Lancelot sentimental, Gawain gallant, Tristan the hunter-harper with a touch of woodland charm. But there is little vitality to any figure in the French poets, unless it be to the gentle Enide, most realistic study of faithful wifehood before Griselda and much more *simpatica*. One breathes the air of the court, where people amuse themselves in idlesse with fine-spun broodings over their own emotions, rather than that of open country, where in the *strom der Welt* a character may grow. There is in consequence a certain fantastic unreality to the romances, rather like that in the novels of Richardson, and quite apart from their supernatural machinery and strange inventions. Professor Ker is

[1] *Erec and Enide*, p. 306.

justified in saying that "the romantic schools, following on the earlier heroic literature, generally substituted a more shallow formal limited set of portraits for the larger and freer portraits of the heroic age, making up for this defect by extravagance in other respects,—in the incidents, the phrasing, the sentimental pathos, the rhetorical conceits."[1]

Yet the more robust art of Fielding, or perhaps it would be better to say the art of Chaucer, has also now and then a prototype. Realism is not confined in these poets to a brilliant use of descriptive detail. Every now and then a dramatic scene is found, humorously and vigorously executed; bits of capital dialogue full of searching repartee are not infrequent. Irony is common—vehement and rough in the Teutonic verse of Wolfram von Eschenbach, at once so grotesque and so tender,—slyer, cleverer, in Chrétien, who is French to his finger-tips. Suddenly, men and women cease to fight and languish; they take to behaving naturally. Chrétien's realism, like that of Chaucer, is richest in his settings and introductions; just as Chaucer in the *Prologue* is several removes nearer to actual life than in the *Knight's Tale*, so Chrétien in his little prologues and epilogues forgets his courtly ways and lets his people act as they please. In such scenes, he and his greater successor are no longer following traditional models, they are drawing straight from life. A capital example is the opening of *Yvain*. The king, to the general surprise, retreats abruptly from the feast, because he suddenly feels sleepy. The queen goes with him, and the knights, gathered at guard around the door of his chamber, fall to chatting. Gawain is there, and Kay, and Ywain, and a pleasant though not very

[1] Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 354.

mighty knight called Colgrevaunce. Colgrevaunce begins a story about an adventure in which he had the worst of it. The queen hears enough to whet her curiosity, and slips out stealthily among them; Colgrevaunce is the only one quick enough to rise to his feet. Kay, "who was very quarrelsome, mean, sarcastic and abusive," begins to scold. How natural that is! Which of us has not felt irritated at being caught napping in our manners? Guenevere takes no trouble to be courtly in her reply: "Really, Kay," says she: "I think you would burst if you could not pour out the poison of which you are so full. You are troublesome and mean thus to annoy your companions."[1] As the talk goes on, full of spirit and character, one sees the group, one catches their very accents. Real sensitiveness of observation, a real sense of the humors of life, went to writing such comedy scenes.

But after all, realism, whether comic or sentimental, is not the chief asset of these poems. That is found in their brave romantic temper. They give the nearest approach literature possesses to the well-spring of romance, and if we are not quite at the fountainhead, the waters none the less bubble fresh and free as if rejoicing in a first escape from prison. Twelfth century romance-poetry marks the beginning only of a long development. Portraiture as has been seen is embryonic. No hint is given of that rich development of epic structure toward which Arthurian romance was to move; the creative forces in mediæval life are all here, but they are as yet unfused and unrelated. Nor is the romantic quality by any means at its finest. Compared with the magical suggestiveness of such

[1] *Erec and Enide*, p. 181.

poems as *Christabel* or *The Eve of St. Agnes*, twelfth-century art seems superficial and mannered; it lacks those overtones and undertones which are the glory of romanticism at its height. For romance is at its inception; centuries must pass before it develops fully. Yet, however much one cares for the coördinated harmonies of a symphony, it is also pleasant to listen to a lark. To read twelfth-century poetry is to wander in a whole meadow-land of larks, singing in a spring-time of the world. As men turn for the dawn of Greek life to Homer, so for the dawning life of the Christian nations of Europe, they must turn to these French romance poets.

CHAPTER V

FRENCH PROSE ROMANCES

I

SLIGHTLY later than the verse romances, though over-lapping them, come the long prose romances which close the epoch in Arthurian romance. The poetry, roughly speaking, belongs to the last half of the twelfth century, the prose to the first quarter of the thirteenth. In the poetry, traces of the old minstrel tradition still linger; these are obliterated in the prose, which reflects a civilization where reading has entirely superseded recitation and song. A later epoch is moreover clearly indicated in the complex interweaving and occasional debasing of the materials used.

These prose romances are the immediate sources of Malory's book. There is no evidence that he had direct knowledge of any twelfth-century poet; but his compilation is based on selections from the long prose works which in his day had delighted Europe for over two hundred years. For if the poems were popular, the prose romances seem to have been more popular still. Indeed, till quite recently, the mention of mediæval romance did not suggest poetry at all, but rather interminable prose stories in black-letter, such as George Macdonald's heroes are always discovering in old libraries where they lie moldering and forgotten.

Modern critics have been inclined to study the poetry and to leave the prose to molder; and they have had good reasons. The poetry is nearer to the source, and the stream of tradition flows more purely through it. Moreover, the narrative verf of the verse is usually lost in the prose. The poems may be long, but the prose goes on forever, episode within episode, till the hapless reader closes the book in despair of a coherent story. These romances are no polished jewels, set with delicate artifice; they are great mines, branching into innumerable dusky galleries, where the wanderer, often returning on himself, gropes bewildered toward an unknown goal.

Yet mines may be full of precious ore, and the wealth waiting intrepid adventurers among the romances is a true Golconda. The prose is indubitably less interesting than the poetry from the point of view of a student of origins; from that of a student of letters, a strong case might be made out on the other side. In these great rambling works, despite all their defects, the spirit of romance finds itself for the first time mature; and while one may with Wordsworth place "the budding rose above the rose full-blown," a world deprived of open roses would be a world less fragrant. The magic that is wanting to the clear and elegant narrative of Chrétien will be found elsewhere [says Professor Ker]:

"In Chrétien, everything is clear and positive. In these prose romances, and even more in Malory's English rendering of his French book, is to be heard the indescribable plaintive melody,—the sigh of the wind over enchanted ground, the spell of pure romance. Neither in Chrétien de Troies nor yet in the earlier authors who dealt more simply than he with their Celtic materials, is there anything to compare with the later prose."[1]

[1] W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 335. London, 1908.

A partial reason for this special charm may be that the prose romances are at farther remove from reality than the verse. Nor may it be forgotten that in them, the complete Arthuriad finally and definitively takes shape. Despite their inchoate character and bewildering cross-relations, the varied aspects of chivalry here find full expression in complex and centralized schemes. The plain narrative of the chroniclers left out some of the best elements in mediæval literature, and could never satisfy imagination. The poets on the other hand present no centralized story. They tell how Lancelot preserved his knightly honor by defying etiquette, how Erec regained his when stung by his wife's reproaches, how Perceval, the pure fool, became slowly wise. But of the Table Round, of Arthurian chivalry as a whole fighting with epic breadth the battle of Christian civilization against encompassing heathenesse, they give scant picture.

Such a picture the prose romances do confusedly show. The countless characters are conceived in their relation to a court which is no longer a mere point of departure but a center of the action. Few heroes dear to the Middle Ages had originally any connection with that court. Long before feudal days, Tristan had loved his Iseult in fashion far from courtly; Perceval, who preceded Galahad as Grail-winner, perhaps first played his part as the Simpleton or Male Cinderella, a humorous example of the weak things of the earth confounding the mighty. Even Lancelot, though his story is late, may at first have had no connection with Arthur. It was the poets who made all these people comrades of the great king, to rank in popular affection beside or above those first companions, Kay, Gawain, and Bedivere. But not till the prose romances succeeded the

poems did the separate tales lose their independence and cohere in one loosely unified whole. Then the story of each individual knight became less an end in itself than a factor in the great tragedy, centered in Arthur, Lancelot, and Guenevere, by which the fair Order of Chivalry was overthrown.

To trace the evolution of this tragedy out of the varying materials supplied by diverse traditions may never be possible. The story familiar to-day contended with other versions for acceptance. In *Perceval le Gallois*, for instance, Guenevere dies in the middle of Arthur's reign from grief over the death of her son at the hands of Kay, and Arthur and Lancelot join amicably in mourning at her tomb, after which the romance wanders off into uncorrelated adventures, dealing largely with Lancelot's efforts to regain his kingdom in France from the usurper Claudas. To create the superbly motived story which we know, a story which holds its own beside the Tale of Troy, some man or men had creative genius.

Who these men were may never be known, though it does no harm to mention names, Walter Map's or another's. The stories traveled all over Europe, growing as they went. Nobody's property, they belonged to everyone, and each scribe rewrote at will, combining adventures, transferring events, altering as he chose. Individual authorship vanished. It was no longer a question of separate personal talent, but of that amorphous and slow achievement of generations, which habitually occurs to the mind at the mention of romance. Each version of most romances has many variants. Even when the general type is fairly fixed, details vary from manuscript to manuscript. Questions of origin and relationship thus become hopelessly tangled, and

are likely to afford problems for research during many a year to come.

Certainly no one would claim for these enormous works the sort of unity possessed by the *Æneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, or any other product of a single mind. Yet it is well to remember that there is an unconscious unity of gradual growth as well as a conscious unity of deliberate plan, and that collective activity may be controlled by an instinct which enables it to reveal in a large vague manner the life of an epoch. The design unconsciously inherent in such a work may be disguised by the very vastness of scale. It is a scale partly due to the number of people coöperating in the development, and also partly to the absence among these people of any one shaping mind, capable of concentrating and condensing the great expansion that naturally results from composite authorship. Mediæval genius is often accused of a deficient sense of proportion; one might rather say that it failed to measure artistic enterprise by the span of human life or by mortal powers of assimilation. Like many mediæval buildings, these works are wrought by successive epochs. They are confusing not from absence of central theme, but from the vital changes and elastic methods incident to a scheme which passes though many minds, and the comprehensive effort to render the detail as well as the mass of life, with no reduction of scale.

This book is especially interested in romance as related to England, and in particular to the work of Malory. Now the romances from which Malory presumably drew, so far as they are represented by manuscripts in the British Museum, have been published by Dr. Oskar Sommer in a monumental edition. Dr. Sommer does not attempt to give a critical text,

such as only collation of all extant MSS. could furnish; and the versions which he prints can rarely if ever be precisely those on which Malory leaned. Nevertheless, his edition places within the reach of students of Malory as large a body of material as any except professed scholars can profit by, and we can not here do better than to take it as a basis. In order to appreciate Malory aright, some knowledge of his sources is essential. Sometimes, his story is hardly comprehensible through compressions or omissions; again, enjoyment of it is far keener when some story treated by allusion only is known. This is especially true of the Grail books, which give a befogged impression to the reader ignorant of what underlies them. And who can help wondering about the childhood of the characters, or wanting to hear of that first kiss between Lancelot and Guenevere, well known to Dante but ignored by Malory? Acquaintance with the romances published by Dr. Sommer can satisfy all these needs.

The Arthurian cycle which Malory condensed contains, according to Dr. Sommer's analysis, six branches:

I. *Lestorie;* or *The Early History of the Holy Grail,* sometimes called *Le Grand San Graal.* This is the account, based on de Borron's poem, of the coming of the Grail to England and of the ancestors of Arthurian characters. It is presupposed but not told in Malory.

II. *Merlin.* A prose expansion of de Borron's poem of the same name. It presents the story of Arthur's birth, youth, and accession to the throne.

III. A continuation, sometimes known as *Le Livre Darthus.* It carries the tale on from Arthur's coronation to Lancelot's arrival at court.

IV. *Lancelot.* A long romance in three parts, con-

cerned with various personages and adventures, till such time as the Grail comes to Camelot.

V. *The Grail-Quest.* It centers in the figure of Galahad, who by the time the last redaction was made had succeeded Perceval as Grail-winner.

VI. *The Morte Darthur.* The final phases of the story, after the return of the knights from the Quest.

This series does not include the Tristan cycle, used by Malory in Books VIII.–XI.; indeed these books are a sort of interpolation, for the plot is in a way complete without them. The Tristan story moreover is the least interesting from an English point of view, for its English affiliations are few. Among the other romances, the *Early History* centers in national ecclesiastical patriotism, the *Merlin* and the *Morte* comprise the national story of Arthur, based on the chroniclers. The other branches are more French in type. But that they were read with avidity in England, many witnesses besides Malory attest. The works published by Sommer are far from including all the Arthurian stories loved by the English people; but they do represent the treasure house from which the good knight drew, and it is at least probable that his tastes were the tastes of his countrymen.

II

"THE GRAND SAN GRAAL"

The story of Arthur had been to the chroniclers a political epic, and to the romance-poets a pleasant setting for pleasant tales. It was when that story drew to itself the traditions gathered around the Holy Grail that a new purpose entered it, and it became not only a vehicle for the deepest passions of the Middle Ages

but a revelation of enduring life that the world can not forget.

From time immemorial, legends connected with rites so ancient that they are dimly known, had centered around a Holy Vessel, symbol of the source of life, and around the hero who gained initiation to its sacred mysteries. For a long while these legends were independent of Arthur; for longer still, the hero of them was (2) Perceval, the "pure fool," who having missed initiation once through his own fault gained it gloriously at the last. At an earlier date, the Grail-winner was perhaps (1) Gawain. When de Borron wrote, Perceval must have been the hero, for his trilogy ran, *Joseph*, *Merlin*, *Perceval*. But by the time the later redactions of de Borron's poem were made, and his ideas had passed into the main line of growth, something else had happened. Lancelot had forced his way like a conqueror into the (3) Arthurian circle; and Galahad, Lancelot's son, had supplanted Perceval as Winner of the Grail.

De Borron's story was based on the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus which told the legend of the imprisonment and release of Joseph of Arimathea. His poem tells how Christ brings the precious vessel containing His Blood to Joseph in prison, and how after Joseph's release his disciples are bidden to carry the Grail westward to the Vale of Avaron. *The Grand San Graal*, or, as it is sometimes called, the *Early History of the Grail*, has absorbed this story; it continues, telling how the Grail comes to England and what happens after its arrival there. But the work is also assimilated to the Lancelot form of the romances, and it assumes Galahad as the future winner of the Grail. It forms as it stands a prologue to the events of Arthur's reign as given in Malory, and it is the first work to be read if

intimacy is desired with the whole Arthurian development as it matured in England.

It is a very long story, probably one of the latest written among prose romances. It is accessible in the original French, first printed in 1516 and 1523, and in a metrical English version sadly near to doggerel by a fifteenth-century writer, the meritorious but unpoetic Herry Lovelich. There is also an earlier English alliterative poem of better quality, which gives the central portion of the story, including the consecration of the first English Bishop, though it does not bring the Grail to England. Christian legendary elements are more prominent in the romance than the Pagan Celtic so abundant in earlier Grail tradition, and it contains curious Eastern features: "Ce roman," says Hucher in his edition, "a des analogies nombreuses avec les littératures orientales et l'on y retrouve plus d'une scène des *Mille et Une Nuits*."[1] Critics concerned with origins have often passed the *Grand San Graal* slightingly by; but it can not be ignored by those who are more interested in result than in process, and who see in this whole range of literature, not so much survivals from ancient days as the characteristic expression of the Middle Ages at their prime.

Apart from the influence of Oriental story and of Christian tradition, the most outstanding fact about this romance is the tone of British patriotism which suffuses it. The intimate relations of Arthurian literature with England are obscured, because French was the language of letters in Britain all through the creative period, and in this language almost all forms of the story after Geoffrey are composed. But the unity of the two peoples during this period was very great so

[1] Hucher, *Le Saint Graal*, i., p. 14.

far as their imaginative life was concerned. Whatever was true of the poets, whose appeal was more to the continent, the authors of the prose romances, whether British subjects or no, not only used British traditions but appealed to British sentiment and had English audiences in mind.

And if anything can be claimed for England as distinct from France during these years of a united literature, one would claim the later forms of the Galahad Grail story. Wherever the author gained his inspiration, he is obsessed by a passionate desire to demonstrate that the Christianity of England is in origin independent of the Church of Rome. "*Le Saint Graal*," says M. Paulin Paris, "resta la plus audacieuse de toutes les tentatives faites avant Luther contre la suprématie du Saint Siège."[1] The point and pith of the *Grand San Graal* is the introduction of Church and sacraments into the British Isles, not by medium of the Papacy, but direct from Jerusalem, and Christ. The author is a mystic, who as Miss Weston says, "knew from inside the material with which he is dealing," and "designed his version from the point of view of one familiar with Christian esoteric teaching."[2] And like many another mediæval mystic, he is heretic at heart. The Roman ecclesiastical system is deliberately ignored, and the esoteric sacramental teaching centering in the Grail at least suggests that the romance registers an attempt to substitute a Grail-Church with mysteries of its own for the accredited order. A challenge is flung at the reader:

[1] Paulin Paris, *Romania*, i., p. 488. See P. Paris, *Les Romans de la Table Ronde*, tome i., for further exposition of the anti-Roman animus of the *Grand San Graal*.

[2] J. Weston, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, pp. 120, 121. London, 1913.

"For there never was creature so hardy
That dorst with-seyn this holy story,
Which Christ Himself with His own hand
It wrote for to don us to understand." [1]

The statement is emphasized. Christ, we are told, wrote twice only before His resurrection,—once for Moses on the tables of stone, once in the case of the woman taken in adultery. The authority of this precious script in His own hand is obvious.

Reading between the lines, thought is carried back over long periods. To the fact that the Christianity of Britain came from Gaul and not from Rome, to the scene where the British bishops, in 603, refused to acknowledge the claims of the Bishop of Rome, represented by St. Augustine; to the stubborn conflict, culminating at Whitby, during which Celtic Christianity, humble, imaginative, strove in vain to maintain itself against the haughty efficiencies, the scholastic and artistic equipment of the Roman system. Rome conquered, but the struggle was not over. In outlying districts, particularly in Wales, that little tract so closely related to Arthurian tradition, the insurgent passion for autonomy and the distaste for foreign rule persisted down the generations. In Wales, as old Welsh verse attests, strange cults and mystic faiths, which may have survived from pre-Christian days, blended not inharmoniously with Christian and sacramental ideas. All through the Norman period, the Welsh Church was struggling to maintain its independence, and in the middle of the twelfth century the persistent attempts of the English king to subject that Church to the See of Canterbury provoked a great revolt. Again, as always,

[1] *History of the Holy Grail*, ch. xxvii., l. 276.

Rome was destined to win out; Canterbury prevailed over Bangor; but nothing can choke men's dreams, and the smoldering fire of resentment and the tenacious loyalty to a national tradition, may well have found vent in cryptic fashion through certain forms of Grail romance.

Glastonbury, again, the Isle of Avalon or Avaron,[1] Glastonbury, the cradle of British Christianity was long recalcitrant to Roman rule. Famous in the tenth century for its Irish ecclesiastics, it was reduced to dire straits in the eleventh through the opposition of Canterbury, the Norman See. "Its connection with the ancient British and Saxon Churches," says the *Catholic Encyclopædia*, "seems to have created a tendency to regard it as the representative of the 'nationalist' aspect of the Church of England as opposed to the 'international' forces centered at Canterbury." And in Glastonbury, perhaps inspired by legends of the Holy Blood brought over from the Abbey of Fescamps, the legend of Joseph of Arimathea blossomed like the thorn associated with his name. The same impulse which proudly displayed the tombs of Arthur and Guenevere to Henry II. and other pilgrims, found satisfaction in the veiled defiance that breathes through those romances in which the imagination took as it so often does its revenge on fact.

Considered as literature, the *Grand San Graal* is dull. Its lack of interest in love or arms, its long-winded allegories, its ascetic tone, have condemned it in the critics' eyes. Yet now and then, intense religious feeling imparts power, and light flashes from the blankest pages. Nowhere is found more completely

[1] See W. W. Newell, *William of Malmesbury on the Antiquity of Glastonbury*, P. M. L. R., xviii., 459 (1903).

than in some passages of this prolix work, the "mysticism" and "majesty" of which Ker speaks as characterizing the prose romances in contradistinction from the poets; nowhere is to be heard more clearly "the indescribable plaintive melody,—the sigh of the wind over enchanted ground." A few episodes and portions are indeed almost unsurpassed in the mystical literature of the Middle Ages. These qualities are faintly discernible in the pedestrian jog-trot of Lovelich; in the French prose the full sense of them is gained. Altogether a strange prelude to the Arthuriad; yet a necessary part of the completed epic. For the long perspective that it opens explains the solemnity of tone, the sense that chivalry with all its fierce passions and frequent lapses is essentially under divine protection and fulfills a lofty destiny, which gives depth and fervor to all the riper forms of Arthurian romance.

III

For "the story which ends in Avalon begins at Jerusalem."[1] As the prose Merlin has it, the *Grand San Graal* records "*les amours de Jésus Christ et de Joseph Darimatie*,"—*amours* charged with that hidden passion the cloister knew. It opens with a prelude (not found in the English MSS.) artfully written to enhance the sacredness of the story, a tale monkish in tone, striking the Catholic and mystic note, yet suffused with the atmosphere of old Celtic dreams. The scene is a remote spot in White Britain; the year, as is carefully noted, 717[2]; the narrator is an old monk. To him, most sinful

[1] G. Saintsbury, *Flourishing of Romance*. Scribner, 1897, p. 106.

[2] Perhaps there really was a hermit and he really had a vision. It is worth pointing out that in 720, a hermit of Wales inserted the Joseph legend in a gradual, which was kept at Salisbury and Glastonbury.

among sinners, beset by doubts, athirst for truth, there comes in his hermitage on the night before Good Friday a vision of the Lord, and Christ gives him a little book, "the joy of the body and the joy of the soul," wherein all his doubts shall be solved. He opens it and reads, still in trance, to floating accompaniment of fragrance and melody,—an odor so sweet and so suave that had all the spices of the world been there they had not been one tenth so fragrant, a sound of sweetest singing, of clear bells, of the flying wings of unseen birds. The spirit of mediæval mysticism at its gentlest is in the scene; it expresses an asceticism much lovelier than that of the Puritan, owing to its frank acceptance of visible and tangible joys as symbols of joys unseen. But greater things are to follow, for on Good Friday morning as the monk is before the Altar, he is transported by angelic power to the Third Heaven, where in open vision of the Blessed Trinity his every doubt is solved. But alas! The book through which this gift is granted vanishes, and he is told that he must suffer before he sees it again. By command, he undertakes a journey or pilgrimage full of fascinating memories of those Irish travels where geographical interest blends with fairy lore. At the foot of a Cross by the bank of a fountain lies a Beast worthy to be encountered by Maelduin. She rises at his approach and they look at each other: "But the more I looked the less could I know what beast it was. For she was diverse in everyway, for she had head and neck of a sheep, white as fresh snow, and dogs' feet and thighs black as coal, the body of a woupil and a lion's tail."[1] Evidently, however, she is "a beast on God's side," as *Perceval le Gallois* has it, for she leads on to the end of his journey, where in the far land of

[1] *Hist. of the Holy Grail*, E. E. T. S., p. 16, ch. xiv., l. 457.

Norroway the monk ministers lovingly to a brother hermit in sore distress and so recovers his precious book. Safe home again, still guided by the Beast, he begins to copy it by Christ's command: and this is what it tells:

Joseph of Arimathea received the Dish out of which Christ ate the Last Supper, and after the Crucifixion caught therein with great sighs and tears, the Holy Blood. Imprisoned for forty-two years, he was sustained by Christ Himself through the Holy Vessel, till Vespasian released him from prison. Then at Christ's bidding he was baptized, and set forth on a journey with a company of pilgrim followers, who bore with them the Ark of the Dish or Grail. The pilgrims made their way to the City of Sarras,—whither as Malory's readers know, Galahad is one day to return. In this Paynim city and its rulers centers the first part of the romance. It is the home land of all Saracens and we are carefully informed that the name is derived from the city and not from Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Here, where Mahomet, sent to save his people, has betrayed his trust and taught them the false worship of the Sun and Moon, the mysteries of God are to be made manifest. Joseph enters the great Temple of the Sun at the moment when King Evalach and his wise men are consulting how to repel the Egyptian invader Thoiomes; he brings the promise of victory contingent on faith in the Most High. This is the signal for long conversion scenes, dull enough, yet full of quaint mediæval reasoning and legendary lore, to say nothing of true feeling. Vision, dream, and miracle come to the aid of the pilgrims, now comfortably settled in what is to be known as the *Palais Espirituel*. The earnest prayers of Joseph for *cette biele cité désconseillie* are answered, when Evalach, taken prisoner by

the Egyptians, gazes in his moment of need at the red Cross which Joseph has traced on his shield, and seeing the Image of the Crucified, cries on Him for help:

> "O verray God that Sittest in Maieste,
> As it is told,—On God and personis thre,—
> Of which I bear the Sign of His passioun!
> So, Goode Lord, take me to salvacioun—
> So save me Goode Lord, in this grete schowre
> From Angwich deth and alle dolor."[1]

A seemly knight at once appears, on a horse white as the lily flower, bearing a white shield with the red cross. There is some good fighting, well set in narrow mountain defiles picturesquely described. By help of the White Knight, the day is retrieved and the victory won, as surely as in the classic battle wherein the Great Twin brethren took part. Thus are converted Evalach, christened Mordrains, and his brother Seraphe, henceforth Nasciens.

Meantime, while Joseph waits in Sarras praying for this conversion, the tone of the romance deepens. As the worshipers kneel in the spiritual palace before the Ark of the Grail, the Holy Ghost descends on them like a ray of fire, and a wind blowing whence none can say breathes on them celestial fragrance. The following pages are charged with intense visualizing of holy things, and a religious fervor strangely in contrast with some of the puerilities that have preceded. In these pages the romance rises to its greatest imaginative heights; for they present that connection with England and the English Church, that desire to show the conversion of Britain as the direct work of the Most High, which quickens the deepest ardor of the author. The spice-

[1] *Hist. of the Holy Grail*, E. E. T. S.

laden wind, the Voice of Christ Himself, are the prelude, and a sense of mysteries broods over the scene. The son of Joseph, Josephes, is bidden draw near the Holy Place, and obeying, beholds within a vision. The symbolism of this vision in its richness of color and suggestion recalls Byzantine mosaics at their greatest intensity. Josephes sees a man arrayed in a "robe more red and more hideous than burning brands," surrounded by five angels also habited in red, with fiery cherubim wings, who bear in one hand flaming swords, in the other the instruments of the Passion. Thus Giotto saw them hovering round the Crucified; thus mediæval imagination dwelt on the dread aspect of heavenly powers, till the Renascence replaced might by grace, and a supernatural awe by simple pleasure in flying and dancing form. These are the angels of Ravenna and Monreale,—not of Botticelli, still less of Fra Angelico. On the Forehead of the Man is written the inscription in Hebrew: "In this likeness shall I come to judge all things in the Day of Terror." The blood is running from His hands and feet. Every detail forces one to one's knees.

This is the first great Grail vision. Romance as it deepens contains many others, none realized with more passion. The Crucifixion itself is now mystically enacted before Josephes' eyes. His father, seeing him in trance, gazes in his turn within the Ark, and beholds lesser mysteries; for always the visions vouchsafed by the Holy Vessel differ according to the faith and need of the percipient. Presently a procession issues from the Ark; Christ, vested gloriously as a priest, is preceded by angels, some swinging censers, some bearing colored candles such as Dante saw in the Earthly Paradise. The procession leaves the Ark, moves through the

palace, censing it and sprinkling it with holy water; and presently the end of all this pageantry is made clear. Josephes receives the Sacrament from the hand of Christ Himself, and with elaborate and significant ceremonial, full of interest, is anointed and consecrated Bishop of that land still unknown to him, *La bloie Bretagne*. With the same oil, miraculously preserved, the chronicler says that all kings of England shall be anointed till Uther Pendragon shall be born. The whole episode is carefully developed, reverently handled, in the best tradition of the imagination of the Church as distinguished from that of court or camp.

During the rest of the romance, the same quality appears whenever the occasion makes it possible. Apart from religious fervor, there is little interest. No romance ever showed more helpless inability to tell a story or present a personality. Yet its interwoven parables of the spiritual life with its dangers and ecstasies have an appeal all their own: those who care for Mother Juliana and *The Cloud of Unknowing*, for Richard Rolle and the *Sawle's Ward*, or, to leave England, for Jacopone da Todi, should not neglect this rich record of Christian experience veiled in symbol and shadow. It is a product of the mystic imagination, which has for once strayed over the borderland into the world of chivalry.

Now and then the religious feeling expresses itself in some graceful episode or tender figure. Attractive, for instance, is the picture of the child Celidoine, borne away from his home by supernatural hands, guarded by a lion, found by his father in a little boat on the high seas, and later preceding the others to Logres, where his boyish purity and eloquence convert kings to the new faith. Celidoine is a good ancestor for Galahad, and

his bride is worthy him. She is the maiden daughter of a Persian king, a type which is to reach its future consummation in the snow-pure sister of Sir Percivale; and her tale is a curious blend of romance and saint-legend. She has many temptations to overcome, including one especially sharp from no less a person than "the lady of Athenys' land," Pallas herself, who lures her with promises of wisdom and joy; but vainly, for the maid replies that rather would she suffer with Christ, and is taken at her word.

Even sweeter is the story of Saracynth, wife of Mordrains, who has long been a Christian in secret. It is one of those charming stories of childhood in which people mistakenly suppose the Middle Ages deficient. Saracynth tells it herself. When she was little, her Christian mother took her to the wood to see the old hermit Salustes. She cried because his long beard frightened her, but he laughed at her tenderly and told her of the Lover of children; and she stubbornly declared that she would never worship this Jesus unless he were fairer than her big brother:

> "And if he fairer than my brother be,
> Him I will loven in alle degree.
>
> "For my brother so fair he is
> That of bewte hath he no peer ywis."

Then came the Vision of the Lord:

> "The cleerest and the fairest persoun
> That ever any earthly eye might looken upon—" [1]

His eyes clear burning as any fire, a red Cross in His right hand. Her whole life has been lived in the

[1] *History of the Grail*, E. E. T. S., ch. xv., ll. 287–308.

strength of this vision, and the Holy Presence of her Lord has never failed her, since she bears Him about with her in the Blessed Sacrament bestowed on her by Salustes.

Even in these more human parts of the story, the ecclesiastical emphasis is plain. Through long stretches, humanity and human interest in the ordinary sense disappear. Severe symbolic disciplines accompany the many conversions that form the staple of the tale. In terror the natural world passes away. Quakings and fearsome sounds shake the *Palais Espirituel.* Burning brands appear, a wondrous darkness falls, and a Voice is heard crying, "Here is the beginning of Dread!" We are in full romantic air, but romance is subdued to purposes of edification. For this is the beginning of that training of the great Kings, Mordrains and Nasciens, which shall fit them to take part in the conversion of England. They are transported to "unsuspected isles in far-off seas," where miracle-ships, holy men borne over the water on the wings of birds, strange storms and healing calms, form the setting. These waves wash no mortal shore. These are the waters over which St. Brandan sailed; perhaps they flow around the fields of Paradise; surely Dante's bark propelled by angels' wings and laden with blessed singing souls, sailed over them; and one surmises that the terraces of the Purgatorial Mount rise not remote from the bleak rocks on which Mordrains and Nasciens, beset with spiritual ordeals, observe their fast and vigil.

Delightful stories about these rocks remind one of the *Arabian Nights;* stories of Forcairs the Pirate, of Pompey the Great, of Hippocras and others. Oriental elements mingle with ecclesiastical legend, to produce a treasure-house of mediæval lore. But the

parable is never long forgotten. Mordrains on his rock is tortured by burning heat, overswept by tempest, tempted by demons in disguise,—and the demons of this romance are especially grotesque and unpleasing; he is visited by holy ones and by the Phœnix; comforted by sunrise over the sea; delivered by remembrance of Jerusalem, and by the Sign of the Holy Cross. Borne off by devils in an evil ship, he is released by Salustes, his wife's old friend, to whom he has given honorable burial, and who now comes to his rescue, upborne on the wings of two great white birds,—a lovely vision. All these experiences are teaching him to crave "the Sight of Soul," and that only:

> "Thus rendeth the Good Lord above
> Sight of Soul to them that Him love
> That deadly thinges will forsake,
> And only to His counsail them take." [1]

Nasciens is in an even stranger place than Mordrains, for his is the Turning Isle, which turns upside down every time the heavens turn. On this insecure habitation, in the description of which quaint science and legend run rampant, he suffers anguish patiently relieved by visions of flying freedom. The Ship of Solomon bears him away at last,—that strangest of all magic ships haunting the ocean of romance, ship of Faith, or of Holy Church, wherein are spindles made from the Tree of Life: ship which is to sail these seas in phantom beauty, till those late days when mysteries are fulfilled, and it shall bear Galahad and his comrades back to Sarras.[2]

[1] *History of the Holy Grail*, E. E. T. S., ch. xxii., l. 247.

[2] Paulin Paris mentions the curious fact that a Breton king named Solomon lent his ship in the end of the 7th century to the last Welsh

These scenes are well placed on the ocean; though the romance may emanate from the cloister, there is a great deal of weather in it; and with the storm and calm, the toss of waves, the flight of birds, the changing light playing on the waters, it imparts a sense of the real sea, very much as Swinburne does, or Masefield, and to a degree rare in the Middle Ages. Yet the far-shining lights are full of mystery, the sounds are awesome, and all outward facts speak of spiritual truths, seeking to penetrate and dissolve the fleshly veil. Purified and prepared at last, the mind is ready for the main action, the passage of these holy men to England and the conversion of the land.

IV

It is in Holy Tide and by full moonlight that the Grail is brought to the land of Logres. Joseph and those of his company who have kept the Holy Law are the real Grail Bearers, and they pass over dry-shod carrying the Sanctuary-Ark. Behind, on Joseph's garment, come others, true pilgrims, but less strong in faith and chastity; sinners as well as saints are transported later in the Ship of the Church. The principal scene, suggested of course by the crossing of the Red Sea, is not without beauty:

> "That night it was both faire and stille,
> and the sea pesible at her own wille,
> withouten tempest owther distresse,
> and the mone shone in all his brightnesse,
> al so bright as in Averill,

king, Cadwalladwr, whose name easily took the form of Galaad or Galahad.

thus it schon both faire and stille,
and this was the Saturday certeinlie
Aforn Easter day ful trewly."[1]

What other night for the Passing could be so lovely or so right as the night on which the mysteries of life and death, of creation and redemption, are contemplated by the Church in an exceeding peace, this most mystical moment in the Church year, associated through her great Ritual with Baptism, with the blessing of the elements of nature,—fire, water, and salt?

So the pilgrims cross, and they find Britain full of Saracens and other miscreants, who are to linger, as is well known, into the days of Arthur. The introduction of Christianity and the conversion of the land make up the rest of the romance, these more objective elements still blended, however, with the symbols of the interior life connected with the Holy Vessel. In the Grail is the founding of wisdom, the beginning of religion, the points of all gentry; and wherever "that swete thing" is, men are near to those secrets of the Most High which may not be approached too eagerly. Again and again, worshipers seek to penetrate the arcana and suffer strange penalties—pierced by a spear, blinded by an exceeding glory; for the marvels of "Christ's verray Knights" are not for earthly knights to savor. Thus Nasciens is struck blind, and Mordrains, lost in thanksgiving, feels of a sudden that his power is taken from him, not to return till Galahad shall come. In penitence he prays for the sight of that good knight:

"A fool I am thrue my trespass:
A, swete Lord, I biseche thee of grace,
and good Lord that thou hast me sent

[1] *History of the Holy Grail*, ch. xli., l. 211.

It pleseth me wel in mine intent
Now worthy Iesus lord of grete renown
that ye wolden grant me for my Gerdown
for my simple and pore servyse
that I ne dye not in no wyse
Tyl that the goode knight of the ninth degree
Of Sire Nasciens that I might se,
Which the merveilles of Seint Graal schal do,
That I might se him toforen me goo,
That I might him both clippe and kisse,
And that were mochel of my worldly blisse."[1]

From the time the Grail reaches England, predictions multiply; for the romance which carries us back to the Foot of the Cross is also looking forward, and the reason for its peculiar quality is that it is concerned, less with a present, than with what has been and what is to come. The future toward which it points is the perfect Christianizing of the land. The Grail will vanish, through human sin, but it will come again; the ninth descendant from Nasciens, the Good Knight Galahad, is he who shall restore it: and the romance continually prophesies his advent, in those coming days of Arthur when the mysteries of Britain shall be fulfilled. Galahad indeed is the figure toward whom the whole story converges and on whom fulfillment waits. On his mother's side as on his father's, he is to be the descendant of the line of Grail-kings in whose keeping is left the Holy Vessel.[2] In tracing this line confusing names appear,—Brons, Aleyn,—and intersecting paths impossible now to follow lead off into other parts of the complex maze of Grail-tradition.

[1] *History of the Holy Grail*, E. E. T. S., ch. xxvi., l. 265.

[2] In this connection, it is interesting to notice that in Wales, the system of appointment to ecclesiastical benefices was hereditary; the religious organization was based in this respect on tribal law.

Meanwhile, the conversion of the land goes on; and the note of expectation is stressed more and more. The faithful are fed at the Table of the Grail, direct successor to the Table of the Last Supper; but there is an empty sacred place, to be reserved till the destined knight shall come. Two sinners, Moys and Symew, set warning at defiance and Moys, sitting in the holy seat, is borne away by seven burning hands. Later he is found agonizing in a fire in a great hall, and though Joseph's prayers staunch half the pains, the rest must be endured till the time of Galahad the Pure. Symew and another sinner, Chanaan, are plunged in pits, surrounded by the tombs of their victims, crowned by swords; all in supernatural flames. Lancelot shall extinguish the flames, and Galahad shall free the sinners from their diverse pains. Other recalcitrants are consigned to the Tower of Marvels, whence till the end of these things are to issue endless phantom knights, servants of sin, to fight with all good knights and true till Lancelot shall put an end to the horror. Nor are warnings alone the order of the day. A White Hart ranges these forests, whom four white lions guard, "as cheerily as the mother lulleth the child on sleep." It is the symbol of the Lord surrounded by His evangelists, and Lancelot shall behold it when the time is ripe. The sword, broken in Joseph's wound by a bad Saracen, shall be welded together and become mighty for good in the grasp of Galahad.

Joseph, imprisoned by a Welsh king with the excellent name of Crwdelx, is defended and rescued by his friends, but dies at the appointed hour and is ultimately buried at Glastonbury. The Christians, coming to Camelot, preach before the fierce king Agrestes, who martyrs some of them, goes mad, gnaws his own hands, and

perishes in anguish before the Cross dyed with their blood; this blood is still to stain it in the far Arthurian days. Interesting interpolated tales appear; in one of them, concerning one Piers, a Grail-keeper, and a Saracen maiden, the familiar note of chivalric romance seeks to assert itself. But the main thought is with the Church and the faith, not with fair Saracen maidens. Josephes, the first Bishop, dies in the fullness of time, leaving in Mordrains' keeping the red-Cross shield by which Mordrains had been converted. Hung on Nasciens' tomb, it is to await the day when Galahad shall win and wear it. King Galafres, a convert, builds for the Grail the castle of Corbenic (*cf.* corban, a gift). One last vision, of a silver altar on which stands the Holy Vessel, of a ministering priest, of a thousand voices giving thanks while the air is filled with the beating wings of innumerable birds; a warning stroke, inflicted by a Man in Flames, to teach that even Grail-keepers may not approach the Mysteries too near—and we leave Corbenic. Merlin shall tell by and by of its tidings, but it will be visited no more till a memorable day.

The story ought to end there; but it has got the habit of continuing and does not know where to stop. So it must tell how the land about Corbenic is laid waste, on account of the wicked daring of one who draws the sword in Solomon's Ship; and indeed were this detail omitted, one of the most ancient features in Grail tradition would be ignored. Celidoine must die, and an ancestor of Lancelot's must have a curious story, involved with that of a lady, fair and true though falsely accused, whose hair shone like torch-light. But on these matters there is no need to dwell. It suffices to carry away the dim intuitions of an epic action behind

the natural plane, extending in the obscure profounds of existence. The *Grand San Graal* has a powerful effect on later romance, for it creates that faint sense of ancient things and of spiritual mysteries which transforms the characters from flesh and blood champions of an earthly kingdom, into instruments of a divine purpose deeply related to the larger issues of human destiny. Through all the reaches of the coming story, gay adventure, joy in fighting and comradeship,—the wiles of Morgan and Merlin, the loves of Tristan,—it diffused an awe, a sense of waiting expectation. Evidently de Borron's plan, if his it was, for the triumphant return of the Grail to England, did not fit in very well with the traditional ending of the story. It involved an indifferent pushing aside of the national tragedy, Arthur's betrayal and defeat, as told by Geoffrey and the chroniclers. The new ideal grafted on the old scheme was from the first doomed to failure. There is confusion here, very like the confusion of life itself. To harmonize the two conceptions was left for later phases of the epic. Meanwhile, the theme is immeasurably expanded and deepened. Absorbed in the bright trappings and fierce doings of chivalry, we may feel sometimes that the soul had slight showing at the court of Arthur. But no one can ignore it even while blood runs swiftest in the veins, when once he realizes that behind the unfolding tale lies this prelude, with its almost sacerdotal elevation of tone, and its initiate suggestion of experience pointing beyond the life of sense to a far fulfillment of spiritual desire.

CHAPTER VI

THE MERLIN ROMANCES

I

THE action of the *Grand San Graal* closes six centuries more or less before the opening of the Arthurian story proper. The romances partially incorporated in the earlier parts of Malory's *Morte* are those bearing the name of the enchanter Merlin. These romances narrate the birth and youth of Arthur, his coming to the throne, his wooing and wedding of Guenevere, or Gonnore. They carry the action forward through three campaigns, against the hostile "kings" of Britain, against the Saxons, against the Romans, and they stop with the record of the birth of Lancelot. The account is founded on the pseudo-historians, especially on Geoffrey; it amplifies his material past recognition, but covers the same ground, up to the few pages which present the final tragedy. For Geoffrey passes at once from the Roman wars to his conclusion, giving no hint of that long development of chivalry in its glory with which later romance was to be mainly concerned, and for which the *Merlin* prepares the way. By Malory's time, the political and patriotic interest had passed into the background, and he compressed the long Merlin romances into the comparative brevity of his first four books, in order to hasten onward to present

his hero Lancelot and unfold his main scheme. Incidentally, he omitted some fine romantic material, as, for example, great tracts of story, some pleasant, some unpleasant, about Arthur's early relations with Guenevere.

If the *Grand San Graal* was composed with a view to the exaltation of the British Church, this succeeding romance, on the secular side, is hardly less English in color. It mixes its topography badly to be sure, but the national instinct is strong in it and it represents almost the whole of the national tradition of Arthur. Merlin, like Gawain, who is the figure second in importance through this part of the cycle, was born and bred in the British Isles. When queer adventures of his in Italy are narrated, they leave us incredulous; we breathe the air of his authentic home only when he is safe again at Camelot, or has wandered at farthest to the forest of Broceliande.

One of the famous Welsh bards of the twelfth century was named Merlin or Myrrdin, and the name in early tradition was given to a prophet and a bard. Before Geoffrey wrote his *Historia*, he composed a little book, the *Libellus Merlini*, which told Merlin's story in part and narrated those prophecies of Merlin later incorporated in the seventh book of the *Historia*. Another work, in Latin verse, the *Vita Merlini*, written about 1148, presents the figure of a prophet-king, who is driven mad by the death of his friends and flees into the forest, where he utters prophetic ravings. This poem is often attributed to Geoffrey, but the attribution is uncertain. It is the Merlin story in the *Historia*, however, which the public adopted. This story is borrowed from the compilation of Nennius, which tells the tale of a marvelous boy named Ambrosius, born of no

mortal father, and endowed with gifts which enable him to read the secret of Vortigern's citadel, constantly undermined by two dragons fighting beneath it. The boy reveals the dragons, and reads their fight as a prophetic symbol of the expulsion of the Saxons by the British.

Geoffrey takes over this story, changes the boy's name to Merlin, and connects him with Arthur, giving him the chief rôle in the enchantments that surround the king's birth, and making him later adviser in ordinary to the realm. But Merlin disappears before Arthur comes to the throne, as he does also in Layamon and Wace. In the romances, the treatment is expanded. The central poem in de Borron's trilogy, *Joseph*, *Merlin*, *Perceval*, was the basis for these romances; only five hundred lines of this survive. Before the French prose *Merlins*, of which all English versions are adaptations, were written, Perceval as Grail-winner had been ousted by Galahad, that is to say, the Lancelot-interest had dominated and permeated all previous romance-forms; and the Merlin story was worked over to harmonize with the new conception. So modified, it became a link between the Early History of the Grail and all portions of the romance subsequent to the advent of Lancelot at court. The extant Merlin romances thus fall into two parts; the part previous to the coronation of Arthur probably represents to a certain extent de Borron's work: the second part, which carries on events from the coronation to Lancelot's arrival at court, is a later amplification, more or less rambling and inconsequent.

There are several versions of Lancelot romance in English. The earliest is a poem of considerable merit, *Arthoure and Merlin*, composed certainly before 1325. Malory's opening four books are the last. These books

are drawn from a source represented by a unique manuscript, known as the Huth *Merlin*, or the *Suite*. It is apparently not based on de Borron's poem, though it claims to be. Another version was more common; it is known as the Ordinary or Vulgate *Merlin*, exists in several slightly differing texts, and is the base of the English poem just mentioned, and also of a tedious metrical version by Herry Lovelich, matching his *Grand San Graal*. This vulgate romance was also translated into English prose, during the fifteenth century, about twenty-five years before Malory's book. In style, the translation is wholly inferior to Malory, but in substance it is finer at many points, and we shall now proceed to make a study of it. It represents the best form of the developed French story.

II

In Geoffrey, Merlin's mother was a lady of noble birth, his father an incubus of the air,—a being not necessarily evil,—seen by the lady in the guise of a comely youth. In Layamon, the father is described as a glorious being. This invention recalls the *Arabian Nights*, or Irish Pagan tales rather than Christian legend. But the Christian imagination infused a new quality into the story, which made it a fitting link in the main action of the Arthuriad.

In the developed form, Merlin's father is no being of the neutral air, but a devil, straight from the confines of Hell. His mother is no princess, but a simple girl, harried by the powers of evil, who seek to use her as the instrument of their wicked will. The birth of Merlin is the result of a deep-laid plot. The Grail has long vanished from Logres, and heathenesse is once more

in possession there; but demoniac wisdom knows that Arthur and his chivalry will soon appear, destined to the work of restoring to the land the New Law of Christianity. They must be circumvented, and Merlin, human on the mother's side, yet of their own bad tribe, shall be the means. One of their own, endowed with the sagacity of the abyss, shall thwart all the will of God in La Bloie Bretagne. It is in vain that the chosen mother takes refuge in the habit and vocation of a nun; infernal ingenuity betrays her despite her innocence.

Yet it is the vicious scheme of the devils that is thwarted, through the woman's sanctity and the anxious care of her confessor, Blaise, whose dim and ancient figure crosses Malory's pages now and then. The child is christened, and though he may never hope to attain to Paradise, the mother is stronger in him than the father. He uses the weird wisdom of Hell deliberately and systematically against the powers of evil, and his chief joy is in preparing the way for the fulfillment of the Mysteries of the Grail. His enigmatic personality is thus the meeting-point of the nether and the higher powers, and his wild story is full of pathos. The romantic force of the conception thrills now and again through the military tediums of the tale. The account of the persecution of the mother's family is in the best vein of Catholic superstition; it imparts a terrified sense of demoniac evil brooding over human destiny, mingled with grateful assurance that no detail in human drama escapes the watchful care of heaven. When Merlin grows up, his traits are strangely blended, and his figure is invested with the pathos of one forever excluded from the sphere of his desire, and ill compensated by mysterious powers which repel men while they help. In

Malory, his somber figure, appearing and vanishing abruptly, always with something *âpre* and fierce about it in spite of hinted tenderness, breathes pure Celtic magic, drawn from a time before the beginning of time. He is not visualized even by a hint. The fuller version allows him to be seen: "Without fail he was of merveillous prowesse, and strength of body, and grete and longe of stature, and broun he was and lene and rough of hair more than another man, but he was fulle welle furnisshed of body and of members, and a grete gentelman on his moder's behalf; but of his fader I seye yow no more, for ynow have ye herde."[1]

He is, in this version, a baffling personage. At times the Celtic strain asserts itself, as in his interesting feat of bringing over from Ireland the stones of the devil's dance, Stonehenge, to form a monument over Aurelius Pendragon, the brother of Uther.[2] But such capers as are cut in mediæval nether regions are also in the blood; he jests with the knights till they roll off their seats with laughter, his rough horseplay making him a fascinating if awesome playfellow; he scares and amazes them by devices picturesquely conceived, for he is a shape-shifter. Now he flees from court, impelled by that paternal ichor, to take refuge in wild forests far from human haunts. Again he appears as mentor, or prophet of disaster, terrifying yet beneficent in intent, making the court tremble by a flash of light from below. And always at heart he is brooding tenderly over those whom he has taken as his charge; protecting them all,

[1] *Merlin*, E. E. T. S., ii., 405.

[2] This episode is given in Geoffrey and all subsequent forms. Wace and Layamon make it particularly effective. The chronicler briefly says that the wizard brought over the stones "by his engines." In the poets, he weaves his way in and out among them, moving his tongue as if he said his beads, and they become light as feather balls.

especially Arthur, inciting them to ever greater heights of valor and honor. For Merlin, albeit he can never be loved with a straight human affection, gives freely where he may not hope to receive, and his devotion to the Table Round is as ardent as it is unrewarded. Though he may never share the normal life of christened man, his every intent is on God's side. He is no supernatural being like classic faun or satyr, exponent of natural forces in their joyous heartlessness; with his occult powers and his human heart, he is a piteous figure: arch-wizard of the Middle Ages, appealing and repelling, in whom the lure of Celtic magic and of Christian mysticism unite. He is baptized, though he may not hope for heaven; he knows, though he may not draw near to it, the mystery of the Grail; and to him it is given to prophesy its advent and to prepare its way. This is indeed his chief function in the older version of the story; and ever and anon he speaks with deep solemnity of this his mission, "to help accomplish the adventures of the Seynt Graal, that shall be accomplished and made an end in the days of Arthur."[1]

III Merlin's love for Dionas

Who can be blamed for not loving so strange a being? Who would suspect a heart in him? Yet a heart there is, as Arthur may discover and Nimue knows. It is in the great woods, the waste places, whither the demoniac instinct always draws him back, that Merlin is to meet his fate. And it comes to him in the person of the daintiest lady-love imaginable. The fuller romance here excels past measure the succinct and colorless account of Malory.

[1] *Merlin*, E. E. T. S., ii., 304.

For here, Nimue is neither a commonplace damosel nor Tennyson's baleful Vivian, but a little maid of freshest charm, less malicious than mischievous. By such an instrument is the mighty enchanter befooled and severed from human fellowship! A new set of associations gather around her. When Merlin first sees this child-love of his, she is but twelve years old, and her heart is set rather on play than passion. Her father is "a vavasour of right high lineage, and his name was cleped Dionas, and many times Diane came to speak with him, that was the goddess, and was with him many days, for he was her godson." As befits a friend of the "Queen and Huntress chaste and fair,"[1] Dionas is a lover of woods and rivers, and brings up his little daughter among them. Diana promises him that the maid shall win the love of the wisest man on earth. So Merlin finds her, "in a valley under a mountainside round beside the forest of Briok, that was full delitable and fair, for to hunt at harts and hinds and buck and doe and wild swan." And he disguised himself as a fair young squire, "and drew him down to a well whereof the springs were fair and the water clear, and the gravel so fair that it seemed of fine silver."[2] A pretty stage for the love-making. Nimue comes often to this well to disport herself, and Merlin, half-ashamed, wistful, quite clear-sighted as to his folly, begins to lure the maiden gently by hinting at the great marvels he can show her. Eager and childish, she exclaims: "Certes these be quaint crafts and would that I could do such disports!" Whereupon he shows her such, and greater:

[1] The cult of Diana prevailed in Northern Europe during the Middle Ages; she was the tutelary deity, *e. g.*, of the Ardennes mountains and her worship long persisted there. See Nitze, *Mod. Philol.*, iii., 2.

[2] *Merlin*, E. E. T. S., 307–312.

for behold! Out of the forest comes a carole of ladies and knights and maidens and squires, "each holding other by the hands and dancing and singing: and made the greatest joy that ever was seen in any land."

Pleasant playthings for a little woodland maid! And presently, in the midst of the wild wood, appears an orchard, wherein was all manner of fruit and all manner of flowers, that gave so great sweetness of flavor that marvel it was to tell. So the delighted little lady tells Merlin, "Fair sweet friend, you have done so much that I am all yours." It is the most innocent of idylls, full of grace and charm. Lines in an old Welsh poem attributed to Merlin the bard hint at a similar tradition:

"Sweet apple-tree of delicate bloom
That grows in concealment in the woods, . . .
While my reason had not strayed, I rested by its side
With a fair gleeful maiden of perfect slender form."[1]

Classic grace and Celtic magic blend in the melodies that haunt these woods, and for the present the Holy Grail is quite forgotten. But before long little Nimue begins to tease for full possession of her lover's knowledge. For the moment he satisfies her by giving her an obedient river for her slave,—"the repaire of joy and feast," and he leaves these plays and returns to his post, protector of the Table Round. But again and again he seeks his Nimue,—who would not seek so sweet a thing?—and ever she entreats him never to leave her, till finally he yields. It is with full foreknowledge that Merlin tells the secret; when she spoke to him of her longing to know how to create the magic tower of air,

[1] *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, i., 372. [Ed. by W. E. Skene, Edinburgh, 1868.

he bowed down to the earth and began to sigh. None the less he did her will, and on a fateful day they went through the forest of Broceliande hand in hand, devising and disporting; and found a bush that was fair and high and of white hawthorn full of flowers, and there they sat in the shadow. And Merlin laid his head in the damsel's lap, and she began to caress gently till he fell on sleep, and when she felt that he was on sleep she arose softly, and made a circle with her wimple all about the bush, and all about Merlin. And when he waked he looked about him, "and him seemed he was in the fairest tower of the world and the most strong;—and he said to the damsel: 'Lady thou hast me deceived, but if ye will abide with me, for none but ye may undo these enchantments.'" And in truth she stayed by him for the most part, "Ye be my thought and my desire," says she, "for without you have I neither joy ne wealth. In you have I set all my hope, and I abide none other joy but of you."[1]

It is some comfort that her impulse is love, not as elsewhere malice or self-will. Perhaps Merlin was not so badly off after all. But the realm was in sad need of him, and never again did the fair order of chivalry thrive as it did while he watched over it. The tale as told here has a rare and plaintive delicacy. It has also a touch of romantic irony, much finer than in the usual banal conception of the evil siren woman, whom not even the enchanter is able to withstand. Merlin, the wisest of his age, beguiled by the gleeful innocence of a little maid! Merlin, whose life was in restless roaming, confined within a tower of air!

Once and once only, his voice reaches his old friends. A late romance makes much of his "brait" or cry, which

[1] *Merlin*, E. E. T. S., p. 680.

Bagdemagus is the last to hear. Here, this privilege is Gawain's. Gawain is riding through the forest, sorely in need of comfort for he has been bewitched into the mean likeness of a dwarf:

> And ever as he rode he made great mone, and as he made this weymentacioun, he heard a voice a little up on the right side above, and he turned that way where he had heard the voice and looked up and down, and nothing he saw but as it had been a smoke of mist in the air that might not passe out; then he heard a voice that said: "Sir Gawain, discomfort you nothing, for all shall fall as it behooved to fall." . . . "Who is that in the Name of God that to me doth speak?"

asks Gawain; and Merlin mourns that he is so soon forgotten, and explains his plight:

> "My lord Sir Gawain, me shall ye never see, and that heavieth me sore that I may do none other. And when ye be departed from hence, I shall never speke with you no more ne with none other save only with my lief. . . . For in all the world is not so strong a close as this whereas I am, and it is neither of iron nor steel not timber nor of stone, but it is of the air without any other thing by enchantment so strong that it may never be undone while the world endureth." . . . "How is that, sweet friend?" quod Gawain, "that ye be in this manner withholden, that none may you deliver, . . . ne ye may not you show to me, that be the wisest man of the world?" "Nay but the most fool,"[1] quod Merlin:

And so farewell, commending to God King Arthur and the realm of Logres as the best people of the world.

In de Borron's *Perceval*, Merlin seemingly stays alive

[1] *Merlin*, E. E. T. S., p. 693.

till after the death of Arthur: that was a handling well rejected by later writers.

IV

Apart from the treatment of Merlin, the romances that bear his name have their own place and value in the epic development. The spirit of youth reigns in them—youth truculent and turbulent but full of promise. None of the characters except Merlin have reached maturity. Chivalry is nascent, struggling toward the light, but not yet clear either to itself or to others. The Table Round gets itself established, but the ideal for which it stands is faint and ill-sustained; mercy, courtesy, self-control, are hardly within hailing distance, and the old heathen standard of honor summed up in brutal courage and vindictive retaliation rules all but unchallenged. The mellay is "grete and hidouse," the tournament almost as bloody as the battle; yet the outrageous roughness of the fighting, whether in fun or earnest, has a zest which reduces the militant activity in later romance like Malory to mere pantomime. Freshness and vigor of tone give pleasure, and go far to compensate for tumult and coarseness. The general result is in strong contrast to the refinement and spiritual exaltation which redeem the indifference to the interests of the natural man marking the *Grand San Graal*. If de Borron created this difference of atmosphere between the first and second portions of his trilogy, he did a very dramatic thing.

Meanwhile, many of the people to be known later are introduced, put in position, and defined in type. Here is Morgan le Fay, here are the older kings,—Ban, Arthur's ally, Lot, his brother-in-law and enemy, and

the rest. Here are Carados the big knight, Dagonet the fool, Kay; and here above all are Gawain and his kindred. Allusions are found to sundry interesting motifs, developed in variants of the romances; for instance, to Kay's killing of Lohot, the son of Arthur, an episode important in *Perceval le Gallois*. Certain piquant persons appear, unfortunately lost in Malory, as the two Ywains, popular knights whom Malory ignores for some unknown reason, and Galahault, the Giantess's Son, a leading person in the prose *Lancelot*, who is here fighting to win the Sorlois, with ultimate designs on Logres. An occasional good bit of portraiture shows that the imagination is not mechanical but is vividly and delightedly at work on these figures,—figures most of whom continued to be elaborated throughout the Middle Ages, till vitality slowly deserted them, leaving them the fair butt of jest or chap-book. Kay for instance, is true to his traditional character.

> And he was a merveillous good knight if he had not been so full of wordes, for his evil speche made him to be hated among his fellows, and also of strangers that hearde him speak, that after refused to go in his fellowship to seek adventures in the realm of Logres. . . . This tecche [fault] had Kay taken in his nourice that he did suck, for he had it nothing of nurture of his mother, for his mother was right a gode lady and wise and true. But of what Kay said his fellows that knew his customs ne wrought never, but he was full of mirth and japes in his speach for said it of none evil will of no man, and thereat laughed they gladly that knew his manners, and on that other side he was one of the best fellows and merriest that might be found.[1]

[1] *Merlin*, E. E. T. S., 135.

Who can help wanting to learn more than Malory's summary hints about Arthur as a boy, and how he won Guenevere? Here is the story, and it shows a lad by no means ideal,[1] rather devoid of morals in his dealings with ladies, yet endowed with attractive youthful audacity, fervent in love and war. A boyish radiance clings about him, that accounts for Merlin's protecting devotion. Ancient traditions, long antedating the times of chivalry, survive in his exploits. He is strong in the Giant-Killer rôle, specializing in fights with monstrous beings, who have withdrawn into the background in Malory's day. His most spirited battle in the romance is with the Cat of Losanne, fished out of the lake of Geneva as a "lytell kiton blacke as eny cole," which develops into a devil-creature, terror of the countryside, till Arthur kills it on his way to Rome, after an animated and satisfactory struggle. Fairy-tale and myth are still so close at hand that we are reconciled to the absence of chivalric formalities.

Such formalities are hinted at, however, and they rule over the wooing of Guenevere. But no more interest centers in the young lovers than in the gleeful enthusiasm by which Merlin promotes the match. For it is he who brings them together and urges the hesitant lovers to the first kiss. There are pretty scenes. Gonnore watches Arthur from the walls, not knowing who he is, as he fights to repel the Saxons from her father's lands; "And Gonnore and the ladyes and the maiden held up their hands against heaven and prayed God to defend them from death and peril and wept for pitye of the travail that they suffered, and thereto they merveilled that so young a man might that

[1] In these "Merlin" romances occurs the first suggestion that Mordred was Arthur's son.

endure."[1] It is an early instance of the proper chivalric situation. More piquant is the passage telling how in the subsequent banquet Gonnore brings warm water in a silver basin, washes the face and neck of the young champion, and dries them softly with a towel while gazing on him with admiration. After this, the wooing and the wedding go without saying. But there is a complication. Another Guenevere, half-sister to the true, tries in vain to be substituted for her on the marriage night. This lady must be remembered for she plays an important part later in the prose *Lancelot*, and her presence in the story throws a light on subsequent events quite different from that to which readers are accustomed. Did Tennyson know of her, one wonders? For the present she disappears; Leodogan gives Arthur the Table Round and its attendant knights,[2] and life settles down at Logres. The establishment of the Table at Arthur's court is however no special signal for the elevation or the defining of chivalric standards as it is in Malory.

Gawain is next in importance to Arthur, and plays in some ways a more prominent part. One of the interesting features of the romance is the unusual account it gives of the "Enfances" of this hero. It is a pretty story, if less charming than the "Enfances" of Lancelot or Tristram, and above all of Perceval.

While Modred is a babe in arms, Gawain, a "yonge squire," leaves the court of Lot with his brothers at the instigation of their mother, to find and join Arthur, who is hard beset between his internal enemies and the Saxons from over-seas. The picture of the youthful

[1] *Merlin*, E. E. T. S., 219.

[2] No one seems to know how and when the Round Table got into the possession of Leodogan.

troop, "the children," as they are always called, riding through the wilderness breathlessly agog for adventure, on their quest for their shining cousin, is not without vivacity and attraction. It must be confessed that they are a turbulent crew. One brother, Gaheries, is the best of them; musical, generous, chivalric, one may find in him a hint of Malory's gentle knight Gareth, whose contrast with the rest of the tribe furnishes the later writer with one of his finest tragic motifs. Agravain, on the other hand, is the worst of all. Lewd and vicious, "prowde and fell," he quarrels violently with Gaheries, and Gawain has to compound the quarrel. It is well to note how early the type is determined of the evil knight who next to Modred is the leading instrument of the last tragic *dénouement* in Malory.

As for Gawain, the treatment of his figure oscillates between the unstinted admiration accorded him at other times, especially in England, and the less favorable view which finally prevailed. Insufficient attention has been paid to this oscillation, which presents an interesting problem. In this romance, Gawain is scrupulously given precedence at every point. Coming to court as a young squire, he becomes, when knighted, the special servant of Guenevere. Politically speaking, he is the chief supporter of the realm. Complimentary epithets are lavished on him. Yet, if regarded without convention, he is a rather dreadful person. A Berserker rage oversweeps him at any moment; he is not only hot-tempered but unendurably vindictive. In a peaceful tournament, undertaken for pleasure, he is capable of dropping dignified and decent weapons, and killing forty friendly knights with a club of apple wood: as for legs and shoulders, he chops them off with a cold zest which even in that bloody age excites amaze in the

beholders. The truth is that romance, while giving Gawain all official honors, is impelled by obscure but not undiscoverable reasons to present him in this half-savage guise. An explanatory hint may be found in his possession of a magic horse and sword, and in his interesting peculiarity of gaining strength every day as the sun mounts to the zenith, only to lose it as the day declines. These traits suggest remote times long before the days of chivalry.

As a rule, true to the source in the chroniclers, the political interest dominates the romantic in this work. The various campaigns are far clearer than in Malory, and one gains a real sense of the advance of the young king, restoring order in a distracted realm.[1] Touches of unusual realism occur now and then,—as, for instance, in the occasional normal English weather! For "the reyne them grieved sore that then had the night the day, for it ceased never of reyning till that mid-day was passed, and they were so wet great and small that unnethe might they know each other but by their speach." This sounds natural,—but perhaps Merlin had something to do with it, for he has uncanny power over the weather: it is a power somehow associated with the dragon-standard that waves triumphant before Arthur's armies,—"the dragon of the great Pendragonship," here minutely described as a little dragon with a twisted tail, whence flow flashes and sparks.

In summary, it may be said that the place of the romance in the whole sequence is all the better filled for the roughness of the manners and the absence of the refinements of chivalry. The Grail has long since vanished, and Lancelot has not yet come to court.

[1] It is curious that the translator does not recognize Arthur's foes as the Saxons: the "Saisnes" of the original become Saracens in his work.

But through Lancelot it shall be restored some day, and the chief concern of Merlin, as he makes plain in many pregnant hints, is to prepare the way for it. From the moment of the begetting of the Enchanter we are aware of some dim and holy force, fighting against the powers of evil and patiently marshaling its strength that it may subdue the wicked disorders of the land of Logres. Arthur stands out more clearly as the Catholic champion, than in Malory's truncated version; and the restoration of the New Law of Christ to a distracted country that has reverted to heathenesse, is the central and salient action, obscured though it sometimes be in multiplicities of detail. Every now and then a young knight around whom shines a purer radiance appears in the fierce hurly-burly. Such is Nasciens, a knight and also a priest, who bears a name potent in itself to arouse holy associations in the initiate. Such is Eliezer, the boy of Grail lineage who joins himself to Gawain and "the children," as they ride through the forest seeking their great kinsman. Eliezer is on quest for "the best knight" to give him the Accollee; but this best knight is not yet born, therefore he contents himself perforce with Gawain; his vigil, and the ceremonies of his dubbing, are narrated with tenderness and a touch of mystic fervor. In the background of the whole story is a strange castle, where languishes an ancient wounded king, waiting for some mysterious fulfillment and release. There Pelles the King, who takes no share in the wild fighting by which the fortunes of Logres are determined, cares for his little daughter Elaine, a child of seven, in whose keeping is a Holy Thing.

But it is still far from the time when Lancelot shall meet her: Lancelot, prophesied in a dream, and beheld as a child by Merlin at the house of his father King

Ban. His arrival will be the signal for the opening of the main action; and in the vast compilation known as the Prose Lancelot that action can be followed to the close.

CHAPTER VII

THE LANCELOT ROMANCES

I

LANCELOT is a late-comer in the court of Arthur. His adventures did not begin like Perceval's in pre-Christian times, nor did he live like Tristan in the days when heroes fought with sea-monsters. He has no sun-hero attributes of waxing and waning strength, like his last enemy, Gawain. From the outset, albeit brought up by a fairy, he was a courteous young squire of the twelfth century, addicted to hearing mass, and trained in the subtlest etiquette of chivalry. His business in life was to become knight of the Table Round and lover of Guenevere.

This fact makes him less interesting than other characters, to people for whom the interest of a mediæval conception depends on the depth to which its roots had struck. On the other hand, to the not inconsiderable number who value the consummate expression of the ideal of a great period, he presents a fascinating study. It is suggestive to trace the changes through which passed this best-loved figure in romance. He and Tristan are subjected to contrary processes. Tristan begins as a noble and vital character, he ends as a far from admirable martinet. Lancelot, on the other hand, grows more and more appealing, from the twelfth

century to the fifteenth. He starts as a mediæval Sir Charles Grandison, to whom might be applied Taine's excellent phrase: "Let us canonize him, and stuff him with straw"; he ends as perhaps the most human person in European literature before Shakespeare.

The nucleus[1] of Lancelot's story is apparently a folk-tale concerning the theft of a king's son by a water-fairy. As Miss Weston says, the persistent epithet, *du lac*, not especially relevant to Lancelot as we know him, must witness to a fixed and early tradition. She conjectures that the first form of the story may have been a Lai, which became popular because set to especially attractive music. Meantime, the earliest mention of Lancelot is in the poems of Chrétien. Two early poems mention him: the *Erec* and the *Cligès*. In both, he is the third knight of Arthur's court,—a distinguished place, but inferior to that which he obtained later. It is in the *Chevalier de la Charrette* that full information concerning him may first be found.

This poem, studied in a preceding chapter, presents him already as lover of Guenevere. Who placed him there may never be known. Possibly the Arthur story was once aligned with the Tristan story and others, where the husband's nephew is the lover.[2] There are traces of this motif in Geoffrey, where Mordred bears away the unprotesting Guenevere, and it has been conjectured that Gawain, who in the Vulgate *Merlin* is so emphatically described as "the queen's knight" and in this capacity quarrels with the knights of Arthur, may once have been cast for the rôle. Be this as it may, before the chief body of romance was produced the

[1] *Legend of Sir Lancelot du Lac*, p. 21, Jessie L. Weston, Grimm Library, 1901.

[2] At a still earlier date, the lover may have been an other-world being.

moral sense had revolted from the primitive combination with the nephew, and since Guenevere, according to the swiftly-developing canons of courtly love, must have her lover, Lancelot slipped into the vacant place, never again to leave it.

Other Lancelot poems, slightly later in date than Chrétien, embody an earlier tradition and throw some light on the first form of the story. A short *Lai* is extant, attributing to Lancelot the Adventure of Tyolet, that of the Stag with the White Foot; and the fact is characteristic, for Lancelot is to the end a shocking borrower of exploits that rightly belong to other knights. But the most important source for knowledge after Chrétien, is a long, wandering poem by Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, dating from the early years of the thirteenth century and giving a full account of the hero. It tells how Lanzelet,—as the name here runs—is the son of a king, who, driven from his kingdom, dies of a broken heart; and how the child is stolen by a water-fairy and brought up in fairyland. In due time he rides forth to encounter sundry adventures and to enjoy sundry loves; he is three times married, to say nothing of other affairs, but he is never the lover of Guenevere, although he assists in a subordinate capacity in releasing her from an imprisonment. Most of his adventures are those attributed somewhere to someone else, and the poem, which has many primitive traits, reads like a loosely-constructed summary of various independent *Lais*. Lancelot has no marked qualities in it; the hero later to be so distinctive a character is hard to recognize.

A vast Lancelot compilation in Dutch verse was known at least from the fourteenth century. Scotland possesses a *Lancelot of the Laik*, a fifteenth-century

metrical romance dealing with the early portions of the prose romance, the relations of Lancelot with Galehault le Haut Prince and with the Lady of Malehault. These characters are unknown to the early verse-romances; both the Dutch poem and the Scotch lean upon the French prose romance in which Lancelot finally came to his own.

This romance, most elaborate of similar compositions, was apparently better loved than even its sister cycle, the story of Tristan and Iseult. It drew to itself story after story, and when the fusion of elements was complete, what was most courtly and passionate in secular emotion and most stirring in secular adventure, united with Catholic mysticism to create the complete image of chivalry as it fain would be.

The *Merlin* was the prelude to the Arthuriad. The *Lancelot* took up the tale at the inception of the action proper, and carried it to the end. The old Arthur-story as found in Geoffrey formed the basis, but its military and political character was obscured by other interests, by the loves of Lancelot and Guenevere and the quest of the Holy Grail. Who was chief author of the romance may never be known. The name of Walter Map recurs persistently in the manuscripts, especially in connection with the Galahad Grail-Quest. But this gentleman, author of a book of court gossip and satire called *De Nugis Curialium*, or *Courtly Trifles*, presents nothing in his accredited work to indicate interests or powers capable of producing romance. He may have been the author of a *Lancelot* which formed the basis of later developments, but no one man created the whole of the great work. The *Lancelot* is our best mediæval example of communal authorship. No individual quality is in it, like that which differentiates

Chrétien from Wolfram, Tennyson from Browning: it reveals the temperament of an epoch.

Fewer English connections appear in this romance than in either the *Grand San Graal* or the *Merlin*. In contrast to the inveterately English Gawain, or the Celtic Tristan, Lancelot was Frenchman born, and he retained his French traits through all his long career. Great possessions in France are his,—but he is very indifferent to his heritage; what he cherishes is his preëminence in the Table Round. Yet traces of English geography survive in the romance: the river Humber, the Bishop of Rochester, known towns, familiar features, constantly turn up among the misty romantic conventions. And a salient fact is Lancelot's devotion to the very soil of the land of Logres. Many readers will recall his passionate regret, in Malory, when exiled; his words in the old French on that occasion are even more moving. His first desire is that his shield be hung in the minster of St. Stephen where he received knighthood. When the ship is bearing him away, he fixes his eyes on the receding shore, changes color, and weeps bitterly. Then under his breath, so low that only Bors can hear, he blesses England:

> Sweet land, delightful, debonair, joyous and abounding in all ease and wealth, wherein my soul and life remain, blessed be thou by the mouth of Jesus Christ, and blessed be they who stay here after me, whether they be my friends or foes. Peace may they have and rest, and may God give them joy, . . . for they who live in so sweet a land are more fortunate than any others: thus say I who have known.[1]

When the English cliffs have disappeared, he retires to his bed to weep. Any patriotic passion which

[1] Sommer: *Vulgate Version of Arthurian Romances*, vol. vi., p. 314.

English readers possessed must have been stirred by such a passage. It is a happy example of the spiritual ties between France and England,—ties severed later in the Middle Ages, only to be renewed, let us hope forever, in our own day.

So far as literary art goes, the first impression made by the romance is hopelessly intricate. The language is easy and graceful, and sometimes has still higher quality; but the adventures lack originality and the situations repeat themselves. High lights are singularly absent. Skill in distributing emphasis was rare in mediæval authors, and the absence of shading makes the story heavy reading for moderns, who are accustomed to be stimulated by all possible devices of acceleration and retard, of suspense, preparation, pause, of pregnant phrase and artful subordination of part to part. The romances finally lost their hold on the public on account of their monotony. Yet there is much latent beauty in the *Lancelot*, and if one recedes to a little distance from it, certain large masses of design appear. It is like a tapestry which examined close shows only interwoven threads, but from the proper point reveals a picture.

Lancelot is the center of the picture; the whole composition is related to him. When he was precluded from winning the Grail by the obstinate circumstance of his relations with Guenevere, a deft invention, a stroke of true genius, transferred the honor to Galahad, his son, and with this invention, the logical structure of the Arthuriad was complete. In Lancelot, the representative protagonist, are focused all those forces which by their union create and by their conflict destroy the mediæval ideal. His figure binds together the disparate stories and diverse elements which the Middle Ages

seem at first to have tossed heedlessly into this storehouse of their delights.

In so prolix and complicated a romance, it is hard to single out special features for notice. Three are, however, of peculiar interest, particularly to the lover of Malory. These are Lancelot's childhood and youth before he goes to court, the earlier phases of his relation with Guenevere, unchronicled in Malory, and his friendship with the lord of the Sorlois, Galehault le Haut Prince.

II

With the exception of a passing mention that Merlin saw "yonge Lancelot" at the court of his father King Ban, Malory omits all reference to Lancelot's youth. It is the systematic plan of the English *Morte* to omit the *enfances* of the characters. This suppression, though justified from the author's point of view, may be largely responsible for the common erroneous notion that literature treating of the child is a modern invention. The *Lancelot* alone is enough to refute the idea, for the story of the small hero himself and of his cousins Lionel and Bors is told with tenderness and humor, and with no mean understanding of children.

A pathetic prelude opens the romance. It narrates the fate of old King Ban, Lancelot's father. Ban, who is a vassal of Arthur's, is fighting with the picturesque King Claudas, who rules apparently over Belgium, called strangely enough *la terre déserte*, of which the capital is Bruges: a country which has been laid waste by Uther Pendragon. Ban leaves his chief castle in charge of his seneschal, and starts to seek help from Arthur, taking with him his young wife Elaine and

Lancelot in his cradle. But the seneschal plays him false and delivers the castle to Claudas, who burns it. Ban, turning around on high land, sees his distant castle in flames, and dies broken-hearted on the spot. The old folk-story has become Christianized; we are told at the outset that Elaine is of the lineage of David, and Ban now dies as a Christian should, for before he falls dead on the ground with outspread hands he reverently consumes three blades of grass over which he has pronounced the Holy Name. This touching Viaticum is not uncommon in romance; it suggests that the popular mind, more tender than the theologians, would not deny the Food of Immortality to the dying, however far away priest and altar might be. The dreary scene, touched with spiritual beauty, is an effective background for a story which even at its gayest will always keep a wistful undertone and a hint of religious destiny overshadowing the whole. The episode prepares the way for the future achievement of Ban's little son in the Grail-Quest.

But another element enters this Catholic and mystical atmosphere almost at once. Lancelot's mourning and desperate mother is suddenly robbed of her baby by the Lady of the Lake, who appears, seizes the child and leaps with him into the water. Elaine retires to a near-by convent, where she is soon joined by her sister Evaine, mother of little Bors and Lionel,—Claudas meantime retaining these two children at his court. Elaine comes daily to the lake, to the point where she has lost her child and reads her psalter there, but she never sees her boy.

Lancelot is brought up lovingly by his foster-mother, the Lady of the Lake. She is none other than Merlin's old love, Nimue,—grand-godchild, it will be remem-

bered, of the goddess of the chase; and we therefore learn with no surprise that the lake is named for "Diane the queen of Sicily." It is really no lake at all, however, for the careful statement is made that the water is only a mirage, concealing fairyland; the late twelfth century was thus naïvely impelled to minimize, even while retaining, the supernatural. Fairyland is a natural mediæval region, where tutors train the child properly; woods and wilds await his pleasure for the hunting, and mass is celebrated every day. Lancelot's religious education is scrupulously provided for. He is a petted child, and every morning he finds on his pillow a chaplet of fresh roses,—except on Friday and other fasts, when joy in roses would ill befit a Christian heart. He grows up a delightful little lad, spirited, not overgentle, generous, affectionate, and proud. Stories of his love for animals, his impulsive generosity, his impatience at control, are pleasantly told. His two younger cousins, Bors and Lionel, are secured as his companions; the tale of the magic wiles by which they were rescued from Claudas's court by the damsel Saraide would be worthy of a place in Grimm, for it abounds in delicate grace and fun and shows no small power of portraiture. The two younger boys are both attractive, but quite inferior to Lancelot. Lionel, the elder, is as hot-tempered as he was to remain in Malory's account of him. When he learns that he is dispossessed of his kingdom, he wails and storms. Lancelot bears himself on the other hand with haughty quiet, and speaks disdainfully of his cousin's lack of self-control.

Lancelot, however, suffers from not knowing who he is. The title, "Son of a King" is given him in his hearing, but he can get no clue to his parentage, and like Daniel Deronda he broods. By and by he out-

grows petticoat government and the process is described with a good deal of humor. The first indication is his breaking out into a rage with the tutor, who has whipped his dogs; and the Lady of the Lake, though she scolds him well, perceives that she can not keep him under rule much longer. Reluctantly and lovingly she prepares him for presentation at court. And here occurs a description of his person, that may well be quoted in all its quaint detail, for nowhere is a better illustration of the mediæval passion for masculine beauty. As the original passage is long, a translation is here given of the excellent summary by M. Paulin Paris:

He was one of the fairest children in the world and the best built in his body. His coloring was lovely, neither white nor dark, but what may be called *clair-brune*. A natural flush of crimson illumined his face, mingling with the other hues in exactly the right proportion. He had a small mouth with lips well colored and well molded, and white close even teeth, a dimple in his well-modeled chin, the nose long and slightly aquiline. Gray laughing eyes, full of joy when he was happy, but burning coals in his anger; then he snorted and snuffled his nose like a horse and ground his teeth, the breath from his mouth seemed crimson. His forehead was high, his eyebrows brown and fine; his hair as a child was beautifully blond and silky but as he grew older it darkened, though always waving delightfully. His neck was sculptured in proportions as beautiful as that of a fair woman, neither too full nor too lean. The shoulders were high and broad, the chest very full. Some people thought that it might have been better a little less developed. But she who knew most about it, the noble queen Guenevere, said that God had given him a chest not a whit larger than he needed, for his heart was so great that it must have burst had it not had enough space

in which to rest. His arms were long and straight, his hands those of a woman but with stronger finger tips, his feet arched. . . . Lancelot sang wonderfully, but seldom. He was for the most part grave, but intense in joy when he felt it. He was gentle and generous, slow to wrath but not easy to appease.

The laughing eyes, the long nose, the high shoulders, the careful note of the modeling, the taper fingers with their strong tips, are all characteristic of the mediæval type as seen in sculpture.

The Lady of the Lake prepares the young squire at length to enter upon the duties of chivalry, and her precepts are very interesting. Kindly self-deceit in every age demands a sentimental reading of contemporary institutions, and the age of chivalry is no exception. The interpretations of Lancelot's *marraine* are doubtless far from historic fact, but they give a good idea of what the Middle Ages at their prime wanted to believe. Time was, says the lady, when no one man was of gentler lineage than another; but as envy and covetousness grew, the weak could not stand out against the strong, and defenders of weak and peaceable folk became necessary, and were called knights. The allegorical interpretation of the knight's equipment, elaborately given, bears out this idea: as he is protected by his shield and armor, so he is to afford protection to Holy Church. The two edges of his sword mean that he must be servant at once to Our Lord and to His people; but the point signifies obedience, which he must be sure to enforce: of practicing it little is said. It is a characteristic thought that his horse represents the People, who are to carry him faithfully whither he will, receiving from him in return care and guidance.

Right soberly Lancelot hears these great things, and,

fairly arrayed in white and silver, and mounted on a white charger, he is escorted to Arthur's court by the Lady of the Lake.

III

Lancelot's early doings in the Arthurian circle are chronicled with minute detail impossible to follow here. Interest naturally soon centers in his relations with Guenevere; they are such as to cause surprise in the uninitiated. For in this early romance, the situation is quite explicitly one which Malory is found to suggest on analysis, but which he slurs over till the ordinary reader has no idea of it. Lancelot is far younger than Guenevere. His attitude toward her is at first the adoring reverence of a young squire for a great lady, a Châtelaine immeasurably above him in dignity of person as well as in position. The gradual degrees by which this relation ripens into passion follow scrupulously the exact code prescribed for such cases by *L'amour Courtois;* possibly they also follow a not infrequent process. For the very development of this artificial ideal, and the commonness with which such relations are pictured, suggest a basis in reality. Women were left much to themselves in the castles; and during the absence of their husbands and of older men generally, the fine ladies pining at home may often have been tempted to solace themselves by amorous play with the young squires, or even the pages, in their charge.

As the romance unfolds its portentous length, Lancelot grows up, while Guenevere remains immortally beautiful, immortally young. That is as it should be; the story is to reflect Lancelot's attitude toward her rather than cold fact. But one can not say that there

is anything moving or convincing in the story of their love. The couple step through the development of their passion with the mincing grace of a minuet. The first kiss, which when poor Francesca read of it had power to set the seal on a passion that should live even in the winds of hell,[1] is in the romance prepared with so absurd an elaboration that it was surely stale before given. Still Lancelot swoons, as in Chrétien, at the mere sight of his lady,—so that as he gazes on her, his horse strays off into the water and both are nearly drowned, to the glee of the beholders. Sighs and ardors, displeasures and graces, are the order of the day. It is amazing that the delineation of a human passion should ever have ripened, as it assuredly did, in the later Middle Ages, beneath these carefully crystallized frosts.

So far as sympathy goes, there is less reason to disapprove of the lovers than in Malory. Arthur was quite frankly a husband to whom there was no special point in being faithful. He is scrupulously praised and exalted, and is certainly a majestic figure, especially on the five great feasts of the year when he wears his crown in open court; but he plays rather a mean part, and his own unfaithfulness is far more blatant than Guenevere's. Severe disapproval is visited on him for his failure to avenge the death of his vassal, King Ban, and for the indifference with which he acknowledges, when rebuked for the neglect by a holy man, that he had even forgotten to confess it! This same holy man, in a picturesque scene, addresses Arthur in open court as the most sinful among kings, for the interesting and somewhat startling reason that he seeks to honor the disloyal rich, and ignores the distress of the poor. Arthur makes no attempt to defend himself, but he wins re-

[1] *Divina Commedia, Inferno*, vi,, 133.

spect by repentance; on his knees, barefoot, in the presence of his court, he confesses and receives the discipline. That he is a haughty and aristocratic ruler, loved rather of the nobly born than of the plain people who so gladly desert him for Mordred, is discernible even in Malory. But the situation is explicit here. It is the common folk, or at least *li bas gentilhommes* of the land who should sustain him; but he ignores them, and the rights of the poor can not come before his face.

Repentance is all very well, but it does not make Arthur the better husband. The crisis in the loves of his queen is the result of his own folly in letting himself be entangled in the wiles of a Scotch sorceress, Camille. She gets him in her power up in Scotland, where he should have been busy fighting the Saxons and the Irish who have invaded his kingdom, and throws him into prison, plotting to betray him to Ireland. Lancelot has been discreetly sojourning at a distance from court, but Guenevere can hardly be blamed under the circumstances if she secretly summons him to her side. The magic shield which is to reveal the consummation of the lovers' union now for the first time tells its story; but Lancelot hastens from his lady's arms to the aid of the king. He is himself however trapped and imprisoned by Camille, becomes insane under the stress, and is released. Guenevere in vain tries to nurse him back to health; the Lady of the Lake has to come to the rescue, and the relations between the two women are suggested in a really charming way. When Lancelot recovers, he hurries back to the North, and this time effects Arthur's release, while Camille flings herself headlong in suicide. Arthur on his return formally commends Lancelot to Guenevere, and makes him Companion of the Table Round. The series of episodes

could furnish a whole modern novel, and is a good example of the extravagant use of material in the romances.

Nor is this Camille-episode Arthur's most serious infidelity. For the false Guenevere, of whom the *Merlin* gives a glimpse, half-sister to the true, comes to court, and in scenes of high dramatic tension pleads her cause and is recognized. The true Guenevere, exiled, takes refuge with Lancelot in the Sorlois. There she is treated with deep respect, and only after the death of her rival, who, smitten with hideous disease dies confessing and penitent, does she return to her somewhat indifferent husband.

Under the circumstances, it is no wonder if the queen is at small pains to conceal her relations with Lancelot. These are indeed nominally hidden rather for reasons of delicacy than for any other cause; Arthur is more alive to them than in Malory, and the convention by which they are regarded as crime is reluctantly observed. One is aware that in the thirteenth century when this version took shape, Love was still its own defiant excuse for being.

Meantime, Lancelot never stays very long with his mistress. In wandering is all his joy, and he no sooner appears at court and is dubbed knight than he disappears, plunged in a bewildering complex of quests and adventures. The most picturesque episode in the earlier part of the romance is his conquest of Dolorous Garde on the Humber, a castle beset with fine enchantments. Within the walls is a graveyard containing an empty tomb, in which at last he finds his name, that name which till this point he has vainly yearned to know. The incident, flatly enough told, is an example of the well-devised and truly affecting invention latent in the romance, but lost in its mazes. Before it occurs

the web has become so tangled that all interest in Lancelot's desire to discover his identity has been lost. Yet here is one evidence among many of the hovering idea always affecting the conception of Lancelot,—a figure embodying all that is bright and eminent in knighthood, yet shadow-beset from infancy and always pursued by omens of sorrow. Lancelot changes the name of the great castle to Joyous Garde. But more or less vainly. Tristan and Iseult to be sure will be his guests here; but hither also he is to bear Guenevere after the breaking of the final storm, and here at last he will be buried.

IV

Lancelot had been christened Galehault, and when his child is begotten on Elaine the Grail-Bearer, he is told that this name, forfeited by his fleshly sin, is now restored to him through the son who is to remain ever virgin. Did the old romancer who first named the child conceivably have an additional thought for the friend of Lancelot's youth, Galehault le Haut Prince, who had loved him even unto death?

It is customary to speak of loyalty to king, to lady, and to God as the threefold cord not lightly broken which binds mediæval life into one. But to these might be added another bond of almost equal strength,—"the institution of the dear love of comrades." It is of origin ancient as any, for it dates from the wild days when blood-brotherhood between those who had "mixed their blood in the mark of the footprint" was a tie close as that between kinsfolk. The instinct survived all social changes, and lived into the feudal age, imparting an almost sacramental quality to friendship. Roland and Oliver, Amis and Amiloun, are two in-

stances of the tenderness with which the mediæval mind dwelt on such relations. Lancelot, the perfect knight, must know the perfect friendship; and the pages which describe it are the most vital in his early story. Through the confused tissue of late and sometimes cheap romantic material in the prose *Lancelot*, runs this one thread of gold.

Galehault is unknown to the verse romances. In Malory, he is mentioned from time to time, but he plays no part and his figure is perplexing and pointless. In the *Lancelot* on the contrary he is a singularly powerful and impressive personage; and the affection which unites him to Lancelot is more convincing and endearing than Lancelot's perfunctory passion for the queen.

The opening phases of the friendship are pleasantly told. Galehault is Arthur's most formidable rival. He is a king of almost equal power, ruling over the Sorlois, a wild romantic land lying to the West, wherein the knights are wont to disappear when adventures drive them especially far afield. There are only two ways into it "while the Adventures of Logres lasted," and these are mountain passes strictly guarded. Galehault aims to subdue Arthur and annex Logres, and there is reason to fear lest he succeed. He is a magnanimous, powerful figure, lacking at first the courtly grace of Arthur's knights, but big, brave, and kindly, a man of high honor and of impulsive affections. Early in the course of events he attends a tournament, where Lancelot in disguise conquers him at first. Later, Galehault is the victor, but so thoroughly has Lancelot charmed him that he puts himself at the disposal of the younger knight. His generosity is such that he seeks to defer by a year's truce a tournament in which he is engaged with Arthur's knights, because the odds are

uneven and in his favor. But the crisis comes when Lancelot requests him to promise before witnesses that if he conquer Arthur he shall, in case Lancelot demands it, place himself at the king's mercy without conditions! Galehault, although not unnaturally *trop ébahi* by the demand, concurs, and observes his promise, thus forfeiting all his political hopes for the joy of Lancelot's fellowship.

Fine-spun and fantastic as the situation is,—slightly suggestive of the superhuman scale of emotion in seventeenth-century French drama,—it finds the reader. Galehault is rewarded for his magnanimity by being allowed to manage Lancelot's intrigue with the Queen. He is also encouraged to become the lover of the Dame de Malehault, whose advances Lancelot had scorned; he does not object and a comfortable *partie carrée* is established.[1] Unselfish in friendship at every point, he swears on the Host never to annoy Lancelot, and continues ardently and cleverly to promote his friend's interests with Guenevere, though he knows she will take from him what he values most in the world. His quality comes out when he shows Lancelot the great castle he has built, in which he planned to imprison Arthur and where he meant to be crowned. As the friends look at it, the castle crumbles into the dust, sign

[1] The distinguished position of these lovers is recognized in many passages of mediæval literature. For instance:

> "The moste matere of hir speche,
> It was of knighthood and of armes,
> And what it is to lie in armes
> With love when it is achieved.
> There was Tristram, which was beleved,
> With Bele Isolde, and Lancelot
> Stode with Gunnore, and Galahot
> With his ladye."
>
> Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Book VIII.

of a perished ambition; but Galehault, though he has dearly loved it, and has "never entered it in sorrow without leaving it in joy," sees it disappear without regret, so bent is he on his new disinterested devotion.

Throughout the story, however, though no complaint ever falls from him, the melancholy of his figure is clearly indicated. Lancelot appears to advantage, is delicate, considerate, even tender; but the situation speaks for itself. A tangle of circumstance keeps the friends apart. For a time, Lancelot lives with Galehault in the Sorlois, but he is of scant comfort to anyone for he falls so lovesick that he can neither sleep nor eat. Galehault in despair despatches Lionel to entreat Guenevere to make them a visit; but she in the meantime has sent for Lancelot, with no ignoble motive, but as already told on account of the need for his help in the Saxon-Irish campaign. Lancelot departs. And a little later, when Guenevere is in woeful case, exiled through the accusation of her false sister, to the Sorlois she betakes herself, remaining there under the respectful protection of Galehault, until her rights are made clear. Then, by the counsel of Lancelot, she returns to her indifferent consort.

Meantime, dark portents have been gathering around Galehault, and at last, warned of impending danger by an evil dream, he seeks the help of divination. On scenes of magic and incantation the Middle Ages lavished their imaginative resources, and this scene is high of its type, equaling almost any in romance for awesome weirdness. Lancelot, solicitous and affectionate, has persuaded Galehault to the inquiry, and is present for a while. But at a certain point the wizard bids him withdraw, and after terrible rites have been duly performed, reveals the meaning of the dream. Galehault is to die

within four years, and Lancelot and Guenevere are to be the cause of his death. Lancelot is waiting outside in anguish, to learn the verdict; what shall a man of honor do? Galehault comes forth to comfort and reassure his friend with entire self-forgetfulness, and devotes himself with renewed ardor to Lancelot's interests. Through the garrulous reticence of the romantic manner, which pours out rivers of words when they are least needed, and often misses its best opportunities for expansion, the nobility and tension of the situation can be felt.

So Lancelot follows his magnet, and in due time the prophecy is fulfilled, through no fault of his; for at a false report of his death, Galehault dies of grief,—dies still dignified, silent, uttering no word of complaint. Lancelot finds his tomb and flings himself on it distracted, but is comforted by his old friend Saraide, damsel to the Lady of the Lake, who bids him bury the noble Son of the Giantess in his own tomb at Joyous Garde. Readers of Malory will remember that when Arthur and Guenevere are buried at Glastonbury, Lancelot does not rest by their side. He lies by the friend of his youth,—the man whose majestic, loving figure introduces true human feeling into the early phases of his story.

After the death of Galehault and the consummation of the relations of the lovers, the romance becomes too intricate to summarize. Lancelot's habit of disappearing, already noted, gives occasion for sending other knights in search of him, and they develop stories of their own. To us, adventures and people seem dim; to the Middle Ages, each knight tended to become a definite type, and he who takes the trouble can still

distinguish Agravaine from Gaheris, Bors from Lionel, and relish their stories. Nowhere can the slowly developing arts of portraiture and narrative be studied to more advantage. Some of the figures are well and sharply etched. King Claudas, who reappears in the later part of the romance, is an instance in point, but Mordred is a still more marked example. He is curly-haired, handsome, blond and erect, with a felonious expression. He rides in fellowship with Lancelot, but his evil nature is clearly brought out when he kills an aged priest who had predicted his future crime. Malory's Lancelot had good reason to sigh: "Ever I fear that Sir Mordred will make trouble," when he is bidding farewell to Logres; he had heard this tragic prediction, so savagely avenged, so relentlessly to be fulfilled. Ector, Lancelot's bastard half-brother, is another vivid figure, whose story is a novel in itself. Indeed, enough romantic material is tossed at random into the prose *Lancelot* to equip a library of fiction. And if the adventures fit inside each other like Chinese boxes, till it is rather a puzzle than a literary exercise to straighten them out, that is due to the characteristic liking for the too-much rather than the too-little which always marks a romantic age.

The main plot concerns itself largely with two issues: first, Lancelot's winning back his kingdom from Claudas the Usurper, and second, the Quest of the Grail. The wars with Claudas are inserted after the begetting of Galahad and the visits of various knights to the Grail-castle Corbenic, but before the Quest. Arthur and Lancelot do not enter the campaign at the outset, entrusting it to Gawain, Bors, and Lionel; but after Claudas calls on the Romans for succor, the king and Lancelot cross the seas to Gaul and play their part. The ro-

mance may originally have ended by the surrender of Claudas, by the reunion of Lancelot with the Abbess his mother, and by her death; for at this point the threads of the older romance are all gathered up, and woven into a satisfactory and finished pattern.[1] But the Grail-interest, the most appealing of all, still waits development. It has been early introduced. When very young, Lancelot visits the tomb of Sir Galahad, son of Joseph of Arimathea, who lies crowned, resplendent in white armor, shining sword by his side, red cross on his golden shield; and from this time, mystic signs appear now and again. Twice Morgan le Fay imprisons Lancelot; between the two imprisonments he visits Corbenic, and Galahad is begotten. After the wars with Claudas end, Elaine the Grail-Bearer comes to court with little Galahad, and the misunderstanding between Lancelot and Guenevere, the insanity of Lancelot, and his healing in the Isle de Joie, are narrated much as in Malory. From the time that the Grail visits the court, a more touching and inward quality appears in the story. It is pleasant to know that Guenevere is wistful because the thought of her prevents Lancelot from seeing the Holy Thing, and in his comforting of her there is real tenderness. Tragedy ousts convention more and more, as the conflict between earthly and spiritual desire grows keen within the hero's heart. His imperious longing for the Open Vision is shared by all the Table Round. The Quest is on, and from this point Malory may well serve as a summary, for he follows the old romance with a fair degree of

[1] It is pointed out by Miss Weston (*Sir Lancelot*, p. 145) that the *Lancelot* proper was originally independent of the *Queste* and animated by a different spirit. But the *Queste* is presupposed in the later versions of the romance.

closeness. It is a graceful touch, kept to the end, that Claudin, stepson to Claudas, Lancelot's old enemy, is one of the three knights from Gaul honored by being present at the final Feast of the Grail; he and his father are among the most sympathetic of the minor characters in the romance, and the treatment of them is charged with true chivalric magnanimity. After the Quest, the Romans have to be fought, and Arthur, engaging them across the seas, is called back in the traditional manner. When the king is dead, Lancelot returns to Britain to fight the sons of Mordred; these young men kill Lionel, but are killed by Lancelot, on the very day when he receives news of the death of Guenevere, whom he has not seen since his return. Ector joins Lancelot in a hermitage, and there the story ends.

CHAPTER VIII

MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES

I

WHILE the quick Norman imagination was complicating and enriching Arthurian romance, the English people had not yet come to their own. The intimate relations of this romance with England have already been suggested. National feeling creates the chronicles. However French the verse-romances may be in spirit, they can not escape from England, for the scene of their stories is laid there, in Somerset, Cornwall, Wales, in Winchester, Dover, Chester, London, Bath. English associations, sometimes submerged, are yet constant also in the prose-romances. But so far as language goes, romance-material was not handled again in English after Layamon for several generations, and by the time the English people found their tongue the creative epoch in romance had closed. English versions of Arthurian romance are therefore late and of secondary importance; we must wait for Malory to find Arthur worthily celebrated in the language of his native land.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, a number of English metrical romances dealing with Arthur and his knights were written; one or two

may even have been earlier. These poems have little original value, for nearly all are translations or adaptations from the French; nor are they remarkable as a whole in literary quality. Nevertheless, a few of them have considerable merit; they form an important part of Malory's background; and they are interesting because they show what stories were known and loved in England. Many readers get their idea of these poems from Chaucer's delectable parody, *Sir Thopas*, which is like getting one's idea of Wordsworth from Calverley's riotous imitations. *Sir Thopas* hits all the defects obvious in romance, and makes clever fun of the romantic *clichés;* but only popular things, with some quality to them, get parodied; and even nowadays it is clear enough why the romances were so widely savored.

A mere enumeration of the poems shows that all of the great cycles were familiar to the British Isles. The central story is represented by an interesting work, *Arthoure and Merlin*, not to speak of an interminable *Merlin* in doggerel, covering the same ground with the Vulgate *Merlin*, by the indefatigable Harry Lovelich; also by the Scottish *Lancelot of the Laik*, and by two *Morte Darthurs*, the one a very fine poem in alliterative verse, which follows the chronicle tradition, the other a later poem in graceful stanzas giving a version close to that presented in Malory. The Tristan-cycle has an example, in the *Sir Tristrem*, written in the North of England dialect, which presents, not the debased form of the story found in Malory, but the finer early type. The Grail-cycle is represented in both branches: an early alliterative poem gives the Joseph of Arimathea legend with something of the original fervor, Harry Lovelich's *Early History* trans-

lates the *Grand San Graal;* while a vigorous *Sir Percyvelle de Galles* shows that the older Grail-hero was not wholly supplanted in the British Isles by his younger rival.

Gawain, rather strangely, has no cycle to himself. But he is hero of a number of middle English Arthurian poems, and it is evident that he was a national favorite. The noble story of his Adventure with the Green Knight is perhaps the best known English mediæval work, apart from Chaucer. Various later poems, in which romance is tending toward ballad, recount further episodes about him: his marriage with a fay, —a tale suggesting that told by Chaucer's Wife of Bath,—his experiences with a Turk, his dealings with a rough personage, the Carle of Carlisle. *Ywain and Gawain,* a good translation of Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion,* may also be placed here, as Gawain plays a great part in it; he is also a conspicuous personage in *Golagrus and Gawain,* and in two poems of very different caliber, but alike in possessing a good English ring, and a basis in local tradition,—*The Aunters of Arthur at the Tarnewathelan* and *The Avowing of Arthur.*

Finally, certain minor outlying stories, ignored in Malory, are suggested by poems dealing with secondary or little-known heroes. The attractive *Launfal* of Thomas Chestre, and the later *Lambewell* tell the story of the knight and the fairy mistress, so prettily narrated by Marie de France in her twelfth-century French, and *Libeaus Desconnus,* "The Fair Unknown," is the popular story of a knight known in French as *Le Bel Inconnu,* in German as *Wigalois,* and in Italian as *Carduino.*

In regard to date, the attribution of these poems is often indeterminate. But it is evident that they fairly

well cover the later mediæval period. Some few, like *Sir Tristrem* and *Sir Percyvelle de Galles*, and the alliterative *Joseph*, may go back to the thirteenth century; the strongest and best are from the fourteenth. A number, mostly of inferior quality, are from the fifteenth; some represent the latest decades before the invention of printing, and are virtually contemporary with Malory.

It is perilous to draw conclusions concerning the popularity of mediæval works from the number of copies extant, for we can never be sure what ravages time has wrought. Yet, noticing how few manuscripts of these English poems survive, and reflecting on the great number of *Lancelot* manuscripts, for instance, scattered all over Europe, it is hard not to infer that the vogue of the poems was limited compared with that of the prose-romances. Some of the best poems, like *Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Sir Tristrem*, and *Sir Percyvelle*, have come down in one copy only; the same is true of *Ywain*, *The Avowing of Arthur*, and the two *Mortes*. The manuscripts are often written in a dialect obviously different from that in which the poems were composed. As they stand, they represent the Scotch Lowlands and the North of England, Lancashire, and Cumberland; also the Midlands and perhaps certain regions of the South. Geographical provenance is often doubtful, though Northumberland, the country of Caedmon and Cynewulf, where English poetry was cradled, seems still more favorable to poetic production than Kent, the ancient center of scholarship and prose. But no part of England is unrepresented. It is interesting to compare the distribution of English literature in the fourteenth century and in the sixteenth. By the time of Shakespeare,

production is almost limited to London and the adjoining regions; during the fourteenth century, a map would suggest conditions before important urban centralization had taken place, for it would show literary production everywhere.

The development both of narrative and of lyrical art in mediæval England can be traced through the poems, and is well worth following. Some of them, like *Joseph of Arimathea*, and the older *Morte*, belong to the fourteenth-century revival of the old alliterative measures native to England in Anglo-Saxon days. Their stately movement, unmusical to modern ears but enriched by all the old devices of initial letter-rhyme, parallel and repetition, is of the type best known through *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*. Verse combining alliteration and rhyme in various experimental forms, occurs especially in romances having to do with Gawain; *Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which strophes of varying length are composed of a series of long alliterative lines followed by five short rhyming lines, is the most famous of the kind. Other poems, like *Arthoure and Merlin* and *Ywain*, discarded old ties to the native tradition, and were written in the flowing tetrameter couplet imported from France, a favorite meter with all story-telling poets, from Chaucer to Keats and Morris.

These are narrative measures. A large variety of stanzas is also used, showing how England was trying to loose her singing tongue through all this period. It may also be noticed that the stanzas tended toward ballad-forms and folk-poetry, while poems written in couplet usually aimed at a more learned and fastidious audience; the melody of the stanza-poems is in consequence often fresher and more spontaneous, yet the

forms are highly experimental and tentative, and are often far from successful. Sometimes they are inventions which no one apparently ever cared to repeat. The *Sir Tristrem* for instance, using a rhyme-scheme *abababcbc*, has regularly two trimeter quatrains, then a short line of two syllables that brings one up with a jerk, then two more trimeters,—an eleven line stanza as intricate as it is infelicitous. The later *Morte* is in an easier and more graceful measure, a duplication of the ballad stanza, eight lines alternately rhymed. A favorite stanza is the Tail Rhyme, or *Rime Couée* popular in France as well as England. It is strange to realize that this most jingling of meters, with the strong stresses and catchy movement that so easily lend themselves to parody and to doggerel, originated from a Latin measure. Jacopone da Todi's *Stabat Mater* is in the same stanza as *Sir Launfal*, *Libeaus Desconnus* and *Sir Thopas*. The importance of low Latin in the development of English lyric finds here an interesting bit of evidence.

No elaborate lyric beauty can be claimed for any of these poems. They abound in tags and catchwords, they evince more childish artifice than mature instinct for art; it is easy in reading them to understand why the Renascence had to make a new start in evolving lyrical form. Yet they often fall sweetly on the ear, especially when they are least pretentious, and they certainly show a lyric impulse which was destined never to be quite silenced in England.

II

So much for external facts concerning these poems. A more important classification, however, is that made

from the point of view of their intrinsic value. For while it must broadly be said that all alike belong to the period of transmission and translation rather than to that of original creation, they differ widely in merit. Some are mere mechanical transcripts, like the jog-trot of poor Herry Lovelich, who did his best to murder fine romances of the mystical type, his taste being better than his capacity; others, while fairly close renderings of earlier works, are executed with a free hand; an example of this type is the *Ywain*, in some ways a better poem than Chrétien's original. Others present familiar material, like *Sir Tristrem* and the stanzaic *Morte*, yet are interesting because they follow no known version precisely. And finally, a few, while suggestive of sources more or less remote, or affiliated closely with romances in other languages, yet have the note of individual power. Of this last and highest group, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the most famous example; the alliterative *Morte* may also be placed here, and the grim and queer *Aunters of Arthur*. These are all poems of which English letters may justly be proud.

The purely mechanical renderings call for little comment. It is useless to discuss their literary qualities, especially when the finer French original is easily accessible, as in the case of the *Grand San Graal*. Nearly all the poems of the other types, however, deserve discussion for one reason or another.

Arthoure and Merlin, for instance, includes some charming and original interludes of nature description, similar to those with which Gavin Douglas was later to enliven his *Æneid*. The poem leans on some version of the French *Merlin*, and tells the story as far as the betrothal of Arthur and Guenevere. Possibly

composed in the reign of Edward II., it reveals a lingering taste for the more heroic aspects of Arthur's tale, and a survival of that patriotic enthusiasm which moved the chroniclers to dwell on the legendary glories of England.

Ywain and Gawain is a more ambitious and readable piece of work. Although a fairly accurate condensed translation of Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion*, the intelligent translator had an independent mind, and a real style. His octosyllabic couplets flow as easily as Chaucer's, though they are not so sweetly musical nor so subtly varied. The story is a good one, though it is rather obscured by irrelevant adventures. The central point is the wrong against love committed by Ywain. He has won very suddenly the hand of the lady whose husband he has killed, the courting being in the best mediæval manner; but presently he deserts her for the joys of knight-errantry, and forgets to come back at the appointed time to which she had bound him. So he is punished; but as he is very much of a man he retains good English enjoyment of life and circumstance, even while he is supposed to languish in remorse as the French code demanded. The most picturesque feature of the poem is Ywain's attendant lion,—a beast who has nothing to do with the plot, but whom we should hate to miss. The grateful creature is Greco-Roman; he has coursed the forests from the days of Androcles and Æsop, and is to course them till he meets white Una by and by; but it is only in the Middle Ages that he is privileged, when spent with wounds, to be carried tenderly in his master's shield. Each episode in the poem can be referred, like the lion, to a remote source. The magic fountain with the storm that waits on it like an attendant genie,

bubbles in many a fairy wood, and the copper vessel on which the hero beats to rouse the storm suggests savage rites; the Ring of Invisibility has owners before Christian days, the madness of Ywain is part of a ritual by which most mediæval heroes fulfill the proprieties, the lady of his rather careless love may have been a *Fée*, though we may no longer think of her as a Widow of Ephesus: such a sounding gallery of echoes is this one lively poem. But the echoes are caught and woven into the story by a true English voice, singing with less smoothness, less sentiment, less *chic* than his French predecessor, but with more manly directness. There is a hint of interest in national development, when Arthur, settling a quarrel between two sisters, decrees "the first division of land ever made in England." The joy of the poem, however, is the magical atmosphere of romance, unifying all separate features as a soft haze will unify a mountain landscape. Perhaps this atmosphere is most effective in the episode of the gentleman reading a romance aloud in the garden to his little daughter, followed by the story of the bewitched maidens all forlorn, arrayed in rags and sorely driven, who weave perpetual silken garments for a starvation wage. It is a passage that might be used with equal effect in a Maeterlinck drama or in a report of the Minimum Wage Commission!

Sir Tristrem is precious if only because it shows that the beautiful old version of the story was known in England.[1] But one can not help wishing that a man

[1] There is other evidence to the same effect. A fascinating series of tiles from Chertsey Abbey, possibly made at the instance of Henry III., shows a sequence of incidents from Thomas's poem. Tristan plays chess with the merchants, kills the Morholt, lies ill in bed while Mark visiting him holds his nose, sails to Ireland all alone in a little boat, swathed invalid-fashion, but harping none the less, instructs

of more sympathetic genius had chanced to write the story of the hapless lovers for English folk. The poem reads like the proud achievement of a minstrel, who had a critical audience in mind, and in consequence labored to secure novelty for his verse; but the peculiar and artificial meter, though it has a certain energy about it, can not be called a success. One does not sigh with the lovers and watch breathless for the success of their wiles as in Thomas. There is none of the sensitive delight in beauty which blends so charmingly and piquantly with Gottfried's sly satire. Plain unadorned narrative, fairly rapid in movement, depending for effect on sequence of incident rather than on delineation of feeling, is the method of this North of England poem; but unless the story were already known, the reader would sometime find it hard to understand, for the author misses his crises through his desire for brevity, although he pauses for minute description of Tristram's command of the noble art of venerie. The ballad-note, with its frankness, its freedom, its swinging directness and emotional reticence, is suggested again and again. Ballads throve in that North Country; the ladies who listened to *Sir Tristrem* might well a little later have welcomed *Chevy Chace.*

It is the ballad-type to which many other of these romance poems seem tending. Thomas Chestre's *Launfal* is a pretty retelling of Marie's *Lai.* Its swing and ring, its pleasing descriptions, its delightful story,

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Iseult, etc., etc. Anglo-Norman inscriptions accompany the tiles. See, for an interesting account of them, a pamphlet by Roger Sherman Loomis, University of Illinois, *Studies in Language and Literature,* vol. ii., No. 2, "Illustrations of Mediæval Romance on Tiles from Chertsey Abbey."

ensured its popularity in court and in cottage. The fairy-mistress, favorite theme of the Middle Ages, was never more daintily presented than here, where she woos and wins Sir Launfal, and, after disciplining him for his disobedience in vaunting of her beauty, comes to the court pacing on her white palfrey with all its little bells a-ringing, and bears him in triumph away. Launfal himself is a knight in whom all popular mediæval virtues meet. In midst of great poverty, he is lavishly generous and the most hospitable of men. His personal beauty is dwelt on with zest. He has a fair degree of self-control or *mesure*, and his misfortunes are not his own fault, or if they are, the reader condones them, knowing how loyal he had been to his love, despite the blandishments of Arthur's unpleasant queen. So long as story-telling is dear, so long as Morris's *Earthly Paradise* can charm readers, this little poem deserves to be remembered.

Libeaus Desconnus, a poem much more complex in the critical problems it suggests, is another entertaining work. The sources and the affiliations with French, Italian, and German parallels have been carefully and exhaustively discussed by Professor Schofield and others. Such discussion is an attractive pursuit; but the general reader may be content in finding here a capital good story, stirring as a Stevenson tale, with the added charms of faerie. Scott, who loved the old romances so well, and supplied an ending to the mutilated *Tristrem*, borrowed from this source, without improving it, his *Bridal of Triermain*. The poem is full of memories, suggesting the ingenuity with which popular motifs were interwoven in one intricate pattern or another. The Fair Unknown,—who is really Guinglain, son to Gawain,—has the Per-

ceval *Enfances*, kept far from chivalry by a doting mother. Like Malory's Gareth, he is given an adventure to release the sister of a damosel, who flouts him fiercely as he rides with her, and his early experiences vividly suggest the seventh book of Malory. The episode in which he saves a maiden, Violette, from two giants, has no exact parallel; but in the Jousts of the Falcon there is at least a hint of the tournament in which Erec won his Enide. There is a fairy dog, less appealing than Petit-Cru sent by Tristan to Iseult, but perhaps of the same pedigree. The best adventure is the last. In the enchanted castle of Sinadoun, Libeaus routs two evil magicians, and endures the Serpent-Kiss, *Le Fier Baiser*, from an enthralled lady. Nothing is more potent in romantic suggestion than the Lamia motif; the snake with the woman's face glides through story from the days of Lilith. Here she is innocent and presented in touching verse, all the more interesting because this special motif does not occur elsewhere in middle English literature. The *rime couée* strophe used here has less the rocking-horse gait than usual; it can trot and gallop very prettily, and its habitual ambling is not without grace.

III

None of these poems has a more distinct English ring than *Sir Percyvelle de Galles*, nor does any come nearer in spirit to the sort of ballad which Robin Hood and his merry men might have trolled in Sherwood forest. Yet none speak to the initiate of more ancient and mysterious things. The tale is affiliated with the most elusive elements of Grail-legend and Celtic folk-

lore. But to the plain reader it tells a plain story, tells it admirably, with spirit and success. It follows a known series of incidents, presented by many poets in many lands, the best known being Chrétien de Troies and Wolfram von Eschenbach; but it reads in its simplicity like direct and original invention. Perceval's childhood in the forest is less elaborated than by Chrétien, but is given with a touch of domestic feeling and rough humor that well suit the English tongue. We can imagine the loud laughter of readers or listeners at the story of the uncouth boy, brought up in ignorance of all the proprieties and dignities of life, and betrayed into all sorts of naïve absurdities,—the mixed amusement and sympathy when the call of the blood proves too strong for maternal precautions and he rides away in his fool's dress on the wild mare he has tamed, leaving his mother in a swoon. When Perceval reaches Arthur's court, he finds a primitive spot enough, a tent into which he can ride his mare, with no obstacle, up to the very throne. Indeed the mare "brushed the bonnet of the kynge, So near-hand he rode." Arthur is charmed with the fresh beauty of the lad and entertained by his rudeness. Perceval distinguishes himself by riding after the Red Knight who has insulted the queen and killing him with a dart. He tries to get the armor, but does not know how to unbuckle it; however, he is a lad of resources: "My moder telled me Out of the iron to burn the tree," he cries, and he is following her counsels with an improvised funeral pyre when Gawain comes along and gives him better instruction in chivalry.

The same spirited simplicity is maintained to the end. The Red Knight has been his father's slayer, and Perceval in killing him has unconsciously accom-

plished the Vengeance quest which was his duty. In the more sophisticated and Christianized version of the tale given by Wolfram von Eschenbach, this vengeance motif has been wholly obliterated; the killing of the Red Knight is changed from a duty accomplished to a crime to be expiated. But here, simpler morals prevail, and Perceval has done the proper thing. Later episodes, his adventure in *Maidenland*, his union with Lufamour, his dealing with Saracens and the Sultan, are in the frank old English tone. The poem ends as it began on the note of domestic affection; for Perceval now that he is grown up and married remembers how unkind it was of him to run away from his mother, and goes to look for her. He finds her mad and naked in the forest, and her restoration is told in stanzas not devoid of tenderness. The story quite properly ends with the hero starting out on pilgrimage to Holy Land. But this is not a religious poem. Perceval is a good English boy, plucky, stalwart, honest, a trifle dull to the end of the chapter. The truth is that he is the Great Simpleton, hero of a fairy-tale found in many lands, who emerges from a childhood of seemingly hopeless stupidity into a glorious career. It is curious to realize that widespread tradition saw in this character the hero who achieved the Quest of the Grail, and even the very representative of the Savior.

But it did, and the straightforward old English poem gains new meaning and gives new pleasure when we relate it to the marvelously interesting development of Grail-literature as a whole. For though there is no Grail here, and no touch of mystic feeling, this is the story of Perceval the Grail-Winner. The lad brought up in the forest, finding his way to court,

avenging his father's death, proceeds in the poems of Chrétien and Wolfram to visit a mysterious castle where the procession of the Grail passes by. He fails in the first test to which he is there exposed; for he remains silent when he should have questioned concerning the Grail and its rites; but after long wandering and expiation, he succeeds at his second visit in achieving his initiation, heals the king his uncle wounded by the Grail-spear, and, in Wolfram, is made guardian of the Holy Thing. It is interesting to find the first part of this story in a middle English poem: the "Peredur" of the *Mabinogion* had already shown memories of the tradition, and in that wild old Welsh version, Grail talismans appear, though not the Grail itself. The whole problem of Grail romance is thus suggested, by works produced on English soil.

It is a problem too intricate for more than briefest allusion here. The Grail itself is not Christian in origin. It develops from a talisman endowed with magic properties to heal, to nourish, to enlighten, till it becomes the Christian Eucharist, in which the same functions persist, exalted. As for the Grail-hero, he changes in something the same way. The development of the Perceval figure is one of the most interesting evolutions in literature. The *Mabinogion Peredur* and the *Sir Percyvelle* mark the earliest stages, and in both, vengeance is the *leit-motif*, and Pagan survivals are clear. But Perceval the fool becomes slowly wise, and the continental treatment of the story finds its climax in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the most remarkable poem of the Middle Ages before Dante. Wolfram educed a beautiful unity from a confused mass of elements. His Parzival is a sinner; to trace his growth through penitence to purity is the

object of the poem. Old motifs are discarded. The hero's business is now no longer to avenge, it is to free the land from curse and to heal his stricken uncle.

Hints of ancient mysteries concerned with death and immortality are found in nearly all versions of the story. How they became fused with the tale of the Great Simpleton may never be known: the English poem marks a stage in which no occult imagining came to trouble human simplicities. But Sacramental mysticism could find much to nourish it in the old story, and could use the Pagan heritage as an expressive medium for Christian feeling. Yet as time went on still more was desired. The peculiar romance, *Perceval le Gallois*, or *Perlesvaux*, shows the psychological transition. In this work, which may represent the final member of de Borron's trilogy, the lover, the penitent, is gone. In his place, bearing his name, but with faint traces only of his origin, is an ascetic figure endowed with supernatural powers and untouched by earthly passions. The rich humanity of the old tradition has yielded to a ghostly fascination. This romance, full by the way of English associations, is evidence of the growing pressure as the Middle Ages went on for a new type of hero, the characteristic conviction that the Grail should be achieved by a contemplative and ascetic, not by a sinful and struggling man.

So Galahad came on the scene,—Galahad, his brow bathed in the light of a new morning,—Galahad, who fights as in a dream, who has attained even while he pursues, whose aim is neither to avenge an injury nor to heal a sufferer, but simply to possess the Open Vision of Divine Loveliness. As the son of Lancelot, his fortunes were interwoven with those of Arthur, and

the Arthuriad was complete. Connections between Arthur and Grail-story existed in nearly all forms of the Perceval-legend, but they were comparatively superficial. The case was now changed; the Lancelot interest, by a stroke of genius, became the focus for the whole story, and what had been an incoherent mass of imperfectly welded elements fell into shape, including in one splendid whole all varying aspects of the chivalric and Catholic ideal.

The Joseph of Arimathea legend was now connected with the Galahad motif. The *Grand San Graal* (already studied as a French prose-romance) passed twice into English verse; and the middle English alliterative poem, *Joseph of Arimathea*, presents it worthily. *Sir Percyvelle* suggests a primitive form of the earliest type of Grail-legend; the *Joseph* reflects the latest type, stamped with religious fervor, permeated by ecclesiastical influence, remote from folk-lore and indifferent to the militant ideals of chivalry. This poem is briefer and far more beautiful than Lovelich's version of the same romance but it does not carry the story so far along. It is perhaps the oldest of the fourteenth-century poems reviving the alliterative measure; but the dialect of the extant version is Midland, not Northern as in *Gawain and the Green Knight*. It is a highly emotional rendering of the events which preceded the bringing of the Grail to England, charged with a fervor and solemnity which all but evaporate in Lovelich's prolixities; the account of the sacring of the first Bishop of England, in particular, is well worth reading here. The poem leaves Joseph in the Orient, conversing with the converted kings of Sarras. English literature is fortunate in possessing two poems, which, in rather a casual man-

ner to be sure, connect the great Grail-legend in its two most characteristic phases with England. Incomprehensible except in relation to their continental prototypes and parallels, these poems at least show that England shared in the development of Grail-story and was alive to different aspects of it.

IV

The English character is marked even with a sort of intensity, in some of the alliterative Arthurian poems of the fourteenth century. This is especially true of the alliterative *Morte Arthur*, found in the Thornton manuscript and doubtfully ascribed to the Scottish poet Huchowne. The author says that he derives his poem from both chronicles and romances, but it is the chronicle tradition on which he almost exclusively leans, though he evidently knows romances too. Lancelot is present, but he is barely mentioned as one of the "lesse men"; there is no hint that the Grail is near. The interest is epic rather than romantic, the animus military and political, the mood heroic; the poem is indubitably the greatest of its type, with the exception of Layamon. The religious-patriotic note is struck at the very outset; the poet is to tell of men of ancient times, and their strange deeds: how they were faithful in their law and loved Almighty God; of the prince-like men of the Round Table; they were wise men at arms, valiant in action, holding shame always in dread. These men are Arthur and his knights; but through the thin disguise may possibly be seen a great contemporary king, his barons, and his son.

For this poem, like other Arthurian poems of

the period, such as *The Aunters of Arthur* and *Golagrus and Gawain*, seems to glorify Edward III. and his sons, and the events of the years 1346–1364 are reflected in it. Great events were stirring England to a strong awakening of national consciousness, and it was natural that famous traditions should be called on to enhance the emotion of the hour. The poem follows closely enough the old story, dealing with Arthur's Roman wars, with the treachery of Mordred and the final disaster; but in spite of traditional episodes, like the slaying of the Giant of Mont St. Michel,—here told supremely well,—and the fight between Gawain and the Eastern knight Priamus, we are throughout sharing the life of fourteenth-century England and France. The sea fight off Winchelsea, the battle-array of Crécy, are vividly and minutely used. The enemy ships ride at anchor by the rock, secured with ropes; they are held together with loading-chains and filled with chivalric knights; adorned with painted cloths, each piece stitched to the other and covered with shaggy coverlets doubled over, for protection against arrows. There is need, for the archers of England shoot full eagerly, and strike through the hard steel full heavy blows.[1] Here is real fighting, a real sea, and the geography is real throughout. The detail is heavily wrought and effective; one can learn much about fourteenth-century manners and customs from it. Arthur entertains the Roman ambassadors, for instance, with a true royal feast of the period:

There came in at the first course before the king himself boar-heads that were borne on burnished silver . . . well seasoned flesh of deers though it was not the season, with

[1] *Morte Arthure*, Two Early English Romances, Everyman, p. 79.

excellent frumentee . . . and delightful fowl, peacocks and plovers in golden plates, porcupines that had not been weaned; then herons concealed full fairly in their plumage; great swans swiftly followed . . . turkey tarts that whoever wished might taste. . . . Then came the delicacies to satisfy men afterwards, . . . in waves of blue and gleaming they seemed, and the dishes were piled up full high one on the other, so beautiful that all men were delighted at the sight thereof.

One might suppose the dinner over. But no, it starts in afresh: "Then came cranes, curlews, craftily roasted, . . . and pheasants decked with ornaments on bright silver dishes covered with a yellow glaze, with custards and other many dainties, then claret and Cretan wine" . . .[1] one can really not pause longer to hear of this amazing food.

There is a sort of solemn richness about the whole poem. A first-hand perception characterizes it, hard to define since the motifs are familiar and even hackneyed, yet unmistakable to sensitive reading. The feeling is strong and direct like the descriptive power. Take for instance the account of the death of Gawain. Gawain is the figure on which the high light falls; he is perhaps here meant to suggest the Black Prince, and in any case this romance and *Gawain and the Green Knight* mark the apogee of his fame in England. He dies fighting Mordred, and there is true human anguish in Arthur's mourning. The king discovers his good knights in a group, the dead Saracens lying round them; and there is

Sir Gawain the good in his gay arms, gripping the grass with his hand, his face to the earth, his banners inlaid

[1] *Morte Arthur*, Two Early English Romances, Everyman's, p. 5.

with gules beaten down, his sword and his broad shield all bloody. . . . Then looks the good king, and was unhappy in heart, he groans full piteously with flowing tears. . . . He kneels down by the body and takes it in his arms, he lifts up the umberer and kisses him straightway, looks at his eyelids that are fast locked, his lips are like lead and his face very pale. . . . Then the crowned king cries out full loud . . . swoons, but rises up swiftly and sweetly kisses him, till his great beard was bloody all over.[1]

The writer of that scene had seen death; his picture can be paralleled in these later days by many a record.

Imagination and sense for tender beauty are not lacking, to relieve the sternness of the poem. One gets a pretty picture of the knights resting in a meadow while their horses graze, "leaning on their glittering shields, and laughing aloud with delight at the singing of the birds," the larks and the link-whites. An ominous dream of Arthur's about the Wheel of Fortune is admirably given. The Wheel is a common property of mediæval fancy, found repeatedly in sculpture and illumination, in poetry and prose. But nowhere is a more pictorial and vivid setting for it:

"Methought I was astray in a wood by myself," [says the King], "Wolves and wild boars and wicked beasts walked in that desert to seek their prey. These lions full dreadful to behold licked their teeth after lapping up the blood of my faithful knights. Through that forest I fled where the flowers grew high, to hide me for fear from those foul creatures. I came to a meadow enclosed by mountains, the most beautiful that men might behold on this middle region. The space was round and grown over

[1] *Morte Arthur*, Everyman's, p. 85.

with clover and grasses; the vale was even round with silver vines with golden grapes, greater ones than which were never seen, edged with shrubs and all manner of trees,—avenues of trees and shepherds thereunder. . . . Then came down into the vale from the clouds a duchess fairly clad in diapered garments, in a bodice of silk of very rich hue, all overlaid to the hems with embroidery, and with lady-like lappets the length of a yard. . . . She whirled a wheel about with her white hands. . . . The wheel was of red gold with noble jewels in it . . . the spokes were bedecked all over with silver bars and stretched out full fair for the space of a spear-length: thereon was a chair of chalk-white silver, bedecked with carbuncles changing in hues: upon the outer circle there clung kings in a row with crowns of bright gold that burst asunder."[1]

Picturesquely are these kings described. The first, Alexander, is a "little man: his loins were all lean and repulsive to see, his hair gray and long the length of a yard, his flesh and his body lamed full sore: one eye of this man is brighter than silver, the other more yellow than the yolk of an egg." The fifth is Joshua: "a powerful man and fierce with foaming lips." One by one the kings tumble off the wheel, as Arthur, who is to be the ninth, shall do if the dream speak true. And sure enough on the morrow comes Sir Cradok, arrayed as a pilgrim, bringing drear tidings of Mordred's treachery.[2] This is the beginning of the end. The dream comes at the moment of great exaltation, just when Rome has been conquered. It is the turning point of the epic; and the Middle Ages needed no

[1] *Morte Arthur*, Everyman's, p. 70.

[2] Cradok's pilgrim-mantle is one of the relics mentioned by Caxton in his preface to Malory, as evidence that Arthur really lived. It is at Dover Castle, with Gawain's skull.

adventitious enhancements of style to render such grim transitions effective.

There is strange contrast between this solid poem, chiseled with heavy touch, inspired by stern passion for England and the honor of Englishmen, and the other middle English poem on the *Morte Darthur*. This second or stanzaic *Morte*, found in one precious copy in the Harleian manuscript, is of somewhat later date, of immeasurably later psychology. Dignity and elevation are replaced by sweetness, delicacy, and pathetic charm. Fighting has become incidental,—a pastime for the individual rather than a solemn necessity for the nation. Arthur has receded into his final position of *Roi Complaisant*, honored by lip homage but colorless till the last tragic moments. Gawain is a secondary and uninteresting figure. Lancelot, the French knight, Lancelot with his fatal grace, his courtly charm, holds the stage-center; around him are gathered the noble knights his comrades. But two women stand closest,—Elaine the lily maid, and Guenevere, no outraged regal Gaynour, but an angry passionate creature, subjected to recurrent ignominies under which she becomes more and more alive.

This poem, resting on some undiscovered version of the romance, presents the last stage in the evolution of the Arthuriad. The love-interest has established itself at the center, and the mind of the reader dwells not on noble action but on introspective emotion. The frank virginal passion of Elaine, the jealous raging of Guenevere, succeeded by her hot remorse, Lancelot's devotion to Logres and Arthur so sorrowfully thwarted by his relations with the queen, shine out as clearly as in Malory though with a quaint simplicity. Here is part of Elaine's letter, held in her dead hand:

"To King Arthur and all his knights
That longe to the Rounde Table
That courteous be and most of might
Doughty and noble, true and stable,

. . . . . .

"To you all my plaint I make
Of the wrong that me is wrought,

. . . . . .

"Therefore to you to understand
That for I truly many a day
Have loved lealest in the land
Death hath me fetched of this world away.

. . . . . .

"For-thy lordes for his sake
I took to heart great sorrow and care,
So at the last death gone me take
So that I might live na mare.
For true loving had I such wrake,
And was of bliss ybrought all bare.
All was for Lancelot du Lake
To weet wisely for whom it were."[1]

Here is part of Guenevere's last speech, when Lancelot, coming through the "cloister clere" has met her in her nun's clothing:

"Abbess, to you I knowledge here
That through this ilke man and me
For we togeder han loved us dear
All this sorrowful war hath be;
My lord is slain that had no peer
And many a doughty knight and free,
Therefore for sorrow I died near,
As soon as I ever him gan see.

. . . . . .

[1] *Morte Arthur*, Everyman's, p. 124.

"I-set I am in such a place,
My soule's heal I will abide,
Till God send me some grace
Through mercy of his woundes wide,
That I may do so in this place
My sins to amend this ilke tide,
After to have a sight of His Face
At Domesday at his right side.

"Therefore Sir Lancelot du Lake
For my love now I thee pray
My company thou aye forsake
And to thy kingdom thou take thy way,
And keep thy realm from war and wrack
And take a wife with her to play
And love well then thy worldes mate,
God give you joy together I pray."[1]

In the earlier *Morte*, Arthur dies—forgiving all wrongs for the love of Christ, and speaking of Gaynor with his last breath. Here the full mystic motif is present; the magic Barge, the withdrawal to Avalon, the promise of the future. The dramatic theme is full-flowered, and little is lacking in the way of character delineation, of sentiment, or, one may almost say, of plot-structure. But the earlier heroic note is heard no more; it is a poem for ladies in the hall, not for patriots or warriors.

We have one other evidence in British poems that Lancelot had supplanted the more sturdy English Gawain in the sympathies of the later Middle Ages. It is the Scottish *Lancelot of the Laik*,—a late poem in difficult dialect and of no special interest except from the fact that it records in verse the earlier portion

[1] *Morte Arthur*, Everyman's, p. 192.

of the Lancelot story. In the conventional setting of the mediæval Dream, cast in the form of the lover's plaint to his lady, is a rehearsal of portions of the prose *Lancelot:* the wars between Lancelot, Arthur, and Galahad. The chief thing suggested by these dull verses is the awkwardness of Englishmen when they try to move in the highly rarefied and sentimentalized atmosphere of French romance. Courtly love with its elaborations, chivalric etiquette with its rigors and subtleties, were too pronounced fashions to be ignored in Britain. But the straightforward British genius does not take to them naturally. When the grisly ghost of Guenevere's mother rises "yellande" from a Cumberland lake, as in the *Aunturs of Arthur*, to read her daughter a moral lesson, when Arthur grips a monster or routs a giant by the force of his bare hands, when Gawain charges an enemy with vigorous speech and direct blows, the British genius writes *con amore.* When it tries to translate the prose *Lancelot*, it flags and wearies. The clumsiness of the verse contrasts unfavorably with the fine-spun graces and romantic undertones of the French prose, and the lack of emphasis which already marred the original has reduced the entire work to a gray blur.

V

It has just been said that the English genius is at home in writing of Gawain: and this cursory review of English Arthurian romances must single out for special note and praise the rather long list of poems dealing with this hero. Gawain is nearest to the English heart of all fighting men. He has a long and honorable career on the continent. He was known before 1090

and in the first half of the twelfth century Italian babies were named for him. He habitually plays a fine rôle, second only to the nominal hero; almost achieves the Grail, and is indeed so honored that it seems as if he might in pre-literary days have been the leading and central figure of a great oral tradition. But even more than this can be said about the attitude toward him in England. More likely than most of the knights to have been an indigenous British hero, he was cherished in the land of his birth, till the late day when some evil fate befell him and turned him from honored protagonist to a near-villain in the drama. That happened during the development of prose-romance; while these middle English poems were written, his splendor was at its height.

Gawain is the first personage to be associated with Arthur. Called by his Welsh name Gwalchmai, he is noted in old Welsh poems as companion of the king; in the chroniclers, he holds the place of honor nearest the throne, while Lancelot and Perceval are unknown. If before literature began he had held to Arthur the relation of Tristram to Mark, no record of the fact remains; there is no hint of aspersion on his loyalty in the course of the known story. In the chronicles, however, Gawain, though systematically distinguished, is not markedly a more vivid figure than the other fighting men who gather round their chief. It is in the middle English poems that he becomes the center of love as well as admiration, There is an affectionate tone toward him quite different from the official deference shown to Arthur; and the number of poems concerning him, continuing till romance trails off into ballad in the legendary doggerel of the fifteenth century, show his firm hold on English hearts.

It has been claimed that all these poems hold some relation to the continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval* by a certain Wauchier de Denain, and that they point to an original Geste of Sir Gawain insular in origin. However this may be, the English poems retain many primitive elements. Even in the prose *Merlin*, Gawain is enchanted into a dwarf, and as late as Malory, his strength waxes and wanes with the sun, though this peculiarity, plainly once the attribute of a solar hero, is explained for a generation at once sceptical and pious as the gift of a holy man! In nearly all the poems, Gawain is entangled in mazes of enchantment that suggest fairy blood in his veins. He who in Malory is a particularly human and unimaginative knight, visits a castle beneath the ground, with a bewitched Turk who can make himself invisible at will; he is with Guenevere when her mother's grisly ghost rises shrieking from the mist-shrouded Northern lake in *The Aunters of Arthur;* in devotion to the king, he weds the loathly hag Dame Ragnell, to be rewarded by finding her at night a lovely fay. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* he deals with a superhuman being clothed in fairy green, who can walk off with his head in his hands, and he keeps tryst at a Green Chapel which is a hollow fairy mound. Perhaps so great a variety of supernatural motifs is associated with no other knight. Gawain is a real hero of folk-lore, rather than an invention of chivalric fancy.

And at the same time, he became a thoroughly warm and actual human person; in reading about him one discovers all the traits which the Middle Ages desired to find in their ideal man.

Even Mordred, in the *Morte* just discussed, does justice to Gawain. Here is his elegy on his great foe:

"He was matchless on the earth, by my troth; this was Sir Gawayne the good,—the gladdest of all, and the most gracious man that lived under God,—a man hardiest of hand, most fortunate in arms, and most courteous in hall under high heaven; the lordliest of bearing while he was alive." In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* he bears the Pentangle on his shield, and the five points symbolize among other things the five qualities found in him,—frankness, fellowship, cleanness, courtesy, and pity. Perhaps the prettiest description is in *Golagrus and Gawain:*

"Sir Gawain, the gay, good, and gracious,
That ever was builded in bliss and bountee embraced,
That never point of his price was founded defaced,
Eager and ertand and right adventurous,
Illumined with loyalty and with love laced."

"Illumined with loyalty" Gawain remained to the end of the chapter. But he is less often "with love laced." He has gallant adventures, but no real love-story. The reason is made clear in the continental poems about him; his was a fairy mistress, and so he wins no earthly bride. Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, which narrates his wooing of Orgeluse the Proud Lady, is a survivor of the old tradition, which is preserved still more intact in the English poem of the *Wedding*. Sir Ginglain the Fair Unknown may have been the son of the Fay,—one hardly so thinks of Sir Florence and Sir Lovel, Gawain's two sons prosaically mentioned in Malory. As time passed, the fairy connection was evaded or forgotten; but Gawain, who had once been the mate of a fay, remained to the end less likely than other knights to seek a human love.

According to one conjecture, the lady of the castle,

whose blandishments he so honorably resists in *Gawain and the Green Knight*, was once the Fay his mate; while the Green Knight, now her husband would have been the servitor appointed to bring him to her.[1] In the older story, then, Gawain would not have resisted; and the green lace, so important in the tale, would have been the favor to the chosen lover. If this seemingly far-fetched hypothesis is true, the transformation of the story would be a striking instance of rationalizing and humanizing fancy at play on old fairy lore. For in spite of the supernatural elements piquantly retained, which add so romantic a charm to the story, *Gawain and the Green Knight* owes its chief quality to its direct appeal to plain honorable manhood. Gawain is more than honorable, he is attractive. "Gay, good, and gracious" are the adjectives often given to him. Gracious, good, and gay people are still popular; it would be hard to find three better words to describe a well-loved hero. In *Gawain and the Green Knight* he deserves them all. His goodness comes out at the very start, when he springs to the relief of the king, at the embarrassing moment when no one in the court is willing to take up the challenge of the big Green Knight; and his fidelity to his word, in setting out the next year at the bitterest of winter to find the knight and redeem his pledge, shows the stuff of which he is made. His "gayety" is delightfully clear in the joy he brings to the Northern castle where he takes refuge. Although he feels himself under sentence of death, he so adds to the good cheer of the Yule-time festival going on that all members of the castle rejoice in his presence, and he appears to deserve

[1] *Cf.* "Sir Gawayn and the Grene Knight," J. R. Hulbert, *Mod. Philology*, xiii., 8, 12.

Mordred's phrase about him, that he is "the gladdest of all." And as for graciousness, no man was ever harder put to it than Gawain to reconcile courtesy with faithfulness, when the lady of the castle presses him day by day for his love in the absence of her Lord. Gawain stands the test triumphantly and cleverly, repelling the lady without insulting her; his behavior is a victory of delicate manners. And when at the last the Green Knight, while letting him off lightly, yet does inflict a slight wound in payment for Gawain's equally slight lapse in receiving the favor of the lace, the rueful remorse and shame of the hero complete one's affection for him.

So far as plot goes, there is no fresh invention in the poem. The central episode appears in the remote days of Irish epic, in the *Feast of Bricriu;* and any one who desires to know how surprising a number of decapitated persons wander through folk-lore wishing to return the blows that beheaded them, has only to turn to Professor Kittredge's monograph. Many other knights besides Gawain have held to their word under similar difficulties. The Perilous Chapel is one of many such dread and haunted spots, deriving the peculiar horror associated with them from the old Christian habit of founding sanctuaries on the site of buildings already consecrated, in heathen days, to deities feared by mediæval imagination as demons. The exact source and relation of the different elements in the tale are open to discussion still. But the plain reader, caring for none of these things, can delight in the poem. It deserves its reputation as the finest work in English romance-literature before Malory. It is a work of earnest intent, written not with the tripping grace and glee of a Chrétien, but with a moral seriousness

that recalls old Saga days. Yet the story is well organized and developed, rich in atmospheric effects, adorned with French sentiment and delicacy. While the poem is compounded of old elements, it reads like an English product. It shows that England did not need to receive her old heroes back from a long sojourn in France. She had never forgotten them. And to none did she cling with more loyalty than to Gawain: Gawain, the only important knight beside Kay: connected both with the Romance and with the Chronicle tradition, Gawain who, as he is the earliest of the Table Round to be Arthur's companion, is also to be almost the last friend remaining at his side.

Gawain's character was sadly to change before the time of Malory; his degeneration is one of the mysteries of romance.

PART II

THE MORTE DARTHUR OF SIR THOMAS MALORY

CHAPTER I

THE MAN AND HIS BOOK

I

I pray you all, gentlemen and gentlewomen that readeth this book of Arthur and his knights, from the beginning to the ending, pray for me while I am on live that God send me good deliverance, and when I am dead I pray you all pray for my soul. For this book was ended the ninth year of the reign of King Edward the Fourth, by Sir Thomas Maleore Knight, as Jesu help him for his great might, as he is the servant of Jesu both day and night.

. . . . . .

Which book was reduced into English by Sir Thomas Malory, knight, as afore is said, and by me divided into twenty-one books, chaptered and imprinted, and finished in the Abbey Westminster the last day of July the year of Our Lord MCCCCLXXXV.

Caxton me fieri fecit.[1]

SO, out of the very heart of England, the great book springs. Arthurian legend had started from the British Isles in the early dawn of the Middle Ages; it returned to the British Isles when the mediæval sun was setting, and the afterglow of the mediæval day lingers in

[1] *Morte Darthur*, Sir Thomas Malory, Everyman, Vol. ii., p. 401.

Malory's pages. For the English reader, at least, no other record of chivalry will ever seem so noble. Malory wrote two centuries and a half after the close of the great creative epoch, and the lateness of his date well-nigh destroys his value as a source. To the scholar he must probably remain a mere compiler who added little or nothing, and reduced his materials to one tenth their original bulk. But to the lover of romance, his book is the glorious consummation of a long development. It was written at the perfect moment. When printing was once well under weigh, the old traditions broke and romance could no longer flourish; but at first the new art served the old life well. Malory's work, finished in 1469, waited sixteen years for print; but the old knight seems almost by a sort of prescience to have reduced the enormous task of his material to practicable printing bulk. And it was by a significant stroke of good luck that the *Morte Darthur*, honored by a memorable Preface, was one of the chief books to issue from Caxton's press.

For a long time, nothing was known about "Sir Thomas Maleore, knight" beyond his own statement. To-day, he is probably identified with a character from whom a book like the *Morte Darthur* could be expected. A Thomas Malory of an old Warwickshire family succeeded to his father at Newbold Revell in 1433 or 1434. He was M.P. for Warwickshire in 1445, in the twenty-third year of Henry VI. Apparently he had fought when young in the French wars, under that very perfect gentle knight, the Earl of Warwick, of whom an emperor said that if all courtesy were lost it might be found again in him. Later, he must have been involved in the wars of the Roses, for he was excluded from a pardon issued in 1468 by Edward IV. He

died in 1471, in the same year with Thomas à Kempis, and was buried in the chapel of St. Francis at Greyfriars, with the epitaph "Valens Miles."

One can picture the old knight, his days of action done, as he sat, possibly in prison, perhaps banished to his estates in that Warwickshire which was to be the home-country of Shakespeare and of George Eliot, brooding lovingly over his "Frensche book" and transcribing it into English. Surely fame never occurred to him; he wrote for pure delight, in the humble spirit of those anonymous mediæval scribes whose personality is lost while their contribution to life remains. Yet the modern reader is aware that Malory's *Morte* synthesizes a civilization. What the contemporaries of chivalry show close at hand, in vivid but unrelated segments, appears in him unified through a long perspective. Chivalry and feudalism fade before the eyes of the student of the fifteenth century; their glories had departed, and the English Renascence was already in the air. But the old ideals were still potent in many hearts, and it is evident that Malory himself, an aristocrat and patriot, lived by them ardently, though in his own phrase he "had a deeming" that their day was done. His book is full of laments over a degenerate England and a degenerate age; and in its constant undertone of pensiveness, one catches that "emotion recollected" which transmutes prose into poetry and touches beauty with significance. In Malory, rather than in any of his predecessors, is to be found the authentic accent of mature romance: romance, which is always retrospective, always haunted by the memory of glory that has passed or is passing away.

There are many delightful things for which it is

useless to ask him; people who know the mediæval world through his pages alone lose more than they realize. His book is "the last of a singular series of retellings and redactions," and naturally there are many stories which he does not tell, and many touching and admirable portions of the stories he chooses, omitted or travestied. Sometimes he uses dull or debased versions; sometimes all the vitality has left his treatment. Yet even to suggest these lapses in selective instinct may seem carping, for the general impression he gives is: "Here is God's plenty." A more subtle and serious criticism of his work, considers not the choice of material but the method of presenting it. In turning to Malory from the poets of the romantic dawn,—Chrétien, Wolfram, Gottfried—one is disappointed at his lack of freshness. The world seems suddenly like a tapestry regarded from the wrong side; colors are dimmed, detail is blurred. Analysis confirms the impression; Malory's treatment is psychological not pictorial. The rainbow-flashing of the tournament is gone; costumes are "wondrous rich," but there is no feeling for texture, ornament, or design. The minor arts,—carved ivory, fine embroidery, and the others,—have ceased to interest; the decorative detail on which earlier writers so lovingly dwelt is all but wholly absent. The simple touches of twelfth-century authors evoke vividly the most picturesque phase of European history; in Malory, the picture must be inferred from the narrative, and life is gray. Every now and then, of course, effective hints are given; the queens who find Lancelot sleeping under an apple tree move beneath a canopy of green silk; the child Isoud equips Tristram with white horse and armor; La Cote Mal Taillé comes to court in rich

cloth of gold, evil shapen. But pages after pages can be turned without a concrete detail to strike the eye.

To experience the Middle Ages as they were, we must turn, therefore, to the old romances written when the wonder and excitement of them were new. It is these, not Malory, which can quicken sense with a mysterious revival of ancient things. When we listen with the hero of a Grail story to the singing of innumerable white birds till we forget the cares of our mortality, when we watch the sunbeam play on the cheek of Iseult, we know such joy as Keats was craving when he cried: "Oh for a life of sensations rather than thoughts!" The earlier Middle Ages achieve with unconscious ease all that the modern imagists attempt with meticulous effort; they have power to revive sensation in the most jaded. This power Malory does not share. It is not in his pages, from which light, color, form have all but vanished, that one can revel in the mediæval sense of beauty. He assumes his period, he does not reveal it, and moderns, who can no longer assume it, must revert to older authors if they would evoke its bright pageantry before their eyes.

For his day and generation, Malory did right. Fifteenth-century people were as keen as ever on the old stories, with their wealth of emotion and action. Action, emotion, these never grow stale. But the external elements of romance, the tournaments, the pageants, the clothes, had become a thrice-told tale. Everybody knew what a knight in armor looked like; he and his properties were retained as necessary conventions because the world had not yet recovered its freshness of eye by arraying itself in the new vestures of the

Renascence. But interest had shifted from the aspect of things to the spirit, and no one is equal to Malory in presenting the spirit of the epoch that was passing away.

II

At a first reading Malory's book seems to share the amorphous and incoherent character of most mediæval prose-romances. For to pass the time, the book shall be pleasant to read in, as Caxton says, but the mazes of it are as bewildering as those in which it pleased Spenser to lose himself a century later:

> "The waies, through which my weary steps I guide
> In this delightful land of faerie
> Are so exceeding spacious and wide
> And sprinkled with such sweet variety
> Of all that pleasant is to ear and eye,
> That I, nigh ravished with rare thoughts' delight
> My tedious travel do forget thereby."[1]

"Herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue and sin"—and the reader is likely to add that they may be seen all in a jumble.[2]

But first impressions are misleading, and the longer one studies Malory the clearer grows the conviction that his book is a coherent work of art. It marks the consummation of the process, already suggested, by which purpose, coördination, unity, gradually and

[1] Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book VI., i.

[2] So Andrew Lang describes the book: "A jumble . . . but of all jumbles the most poetic and pathetic." Sommer's *Malory*, iii., p. xix.

unconsciously developed out of the unrelated and incongruous elements that were drawn into Arthurian romance.

The twelfth-century poems which inaugurate the romance-tradition were as a rule helplessly inconsequent. They appealed to a public still childish in its demands. Tell me a story! pleads the child, and listens gleefully as the story-teller says: "and then . . . and then . . ." stringing episode on episode, indifferent to beginning, middle, and end. Centralization is equally foreign to the mediæval poet; provided his story entertains as it goes along he cares little whither it is tending, and his poems rarely or never afford the joy which springs from the perception of causality at work in experience. In the endless meanderings of the prose-romances, a different instinct appears, a wavering, intermittent yet increasingly distinct sense of purpose. They are no longer frankly episodic and longitudinal; they represent an immense expansion; and life, if seen in broad enough sweep, has a tendency to reveal design; for life is spherical, not linear, it is coherent, not crumbled, it entangles to resolve, it is centered in crises and advances to climax, though to climax below the horizon. At a word, it is dramatic, and the seemingly casual growth of the Arthuriad, as it absorbs life in wider and wider ranges, testifies to the fact. Arthurian romance taken as a whole is like a great tapestry on which countless forgotten hands have worked. The weave is loose, no thread is held all the time, bulk and detail obscure the pattern. No one person ever saw the entire design, yet it has grown under their labors. One of the extraordinary things in literary history is this emerging of a synthetic vision, an image of a civilization on quest, from the

unrelated and spontaneous activities of many minds through many generations.

But in the last stage of the process, conscious genius, apprehending the whole scheme, became a necessity. The enormous expansion of romance had passed all reason; concentration now became essential, if any main lines of trend and structure were to be revealed. The restraining and clarifying influence of the classic revival was soon to "add order to beauty"; and Malory's book comes at a moment when although no direct Renascence forces can be traced in it, the new spirit may well have helped him to marshal his material with a new feeling for sequence. His book, in any case, marks the final phase of selective work on the romances. Whether another phase had intervened between that book and the great thirteenth-century compilations is not known, though it is natural to surmise that the good knight possessed condensed versions of the stories, since no modest library would have been likely to hold all his ultimate sources. But such versions if they existed have been lost, and it is in the English *Morte Darthur* that romance cycles are at last reduced to such a scale that the critical mind can apprehend the Arthuriad as an organized whole.

The more carefully the book is studied, the more clearly a "shaping spirit of imagination" is seen to preside over choice and arrangement. Malory had little care for original inventions; to him, as to other mediæval writers, the oldest tale was the best, and he commended his book by the demure refrain, "as the Frensche book saith." Nor may one look to him for the type of unity found in Æschylus or Shakespeare. He introduces much irrelevant matter; the richness of narrative detail, even when relevant, obscures the

structure, the point of view shifts as regards characters,—above all, he shares with other mediæval writers that confusing absence of emphasis which makes structural lines or centers hard to discern. In all these respects, he is typically romantic in his art. And at the same time, it is only necessary to recede to a little distance from his book, to discover the stateliness of its purpose and the balance of its parts. His work can only be understood against the background of earlier romance, with its tentative emphases, its uncorrelated monotonies; seen from this point, it reveals an almost Shakespearean genius for welding disparate elements into an organic whole. For it is not too much to say that Malory has constantly the whole in mind. A prescient instinct of the end governs his work from the beginning; there is a deep current flowing beneath all surface play of wave and light to a predestined goal.

III

In order to do Malory justice, one must forget for the time being all about his sources, and consider his book as an integral work of art. The aim, how deliberate each reader must decide for himself, is to present the controlling interests of the Middle Ages,—love, religion, war,—in their ideal symmetry and their actual conflict. Malory's way of doing this is to tell the story of the rise and fall of chivalry, with its three loyalties, to the overlord, to the lady, and to God, as symbolized in the fate of that fair fellowship, the Table Round.

Each loyalty has its exponent. Gawain, Arthur's nephew, through all his light and sometimes evil ways,

is doggedly faithful to his king; Tristram, the eternal lover, harps to La Beale Isoud; Galahad rides forever after the vanishing Grail. Each plays his part on a large stage, with ample room and verge enough to show his dominant passion from every angle, and each is centered in one passion only. Gawain is light o' love and sadly bored by the Grail-Quest, Tristram is unvisited by compunction toward his king or his God, Galahad gives Arthur cool lip-homage only, and makes faint concession to courtly love by permitting the phantom-fair sister of Perceval to gird on his sword. One heart alone is swayed by all three passions, as by contrary winds that wreck the barque. The portrait of Lancelot is Malory's greatest triumph, for in his struggle is concentrated the clash of forces which by their union created and by their conflict destroyed the chivalric ideal.

Around these chief knights gather many figures, some known only by name, some by attributes, others standing out as vivid personalities. Their strength, their weakness, are relentlessly shown; we see them as the book goes on, at once exalting knighthood by their devotion and undermining it by their sins and failures. The Roman wars, the conquests of Arthur, are subordinated and obscured; the knights themselves work out the destiny of their Order. The three loyalties, if controlled by mercy, by courtesy, by that most Hellenic of knightly virtues, *mesure*, would produce perfect knightly honor. But in the world as it is, each thwarts the other, till the struggle among them, implicit from the first, becomes explicit and leads to the destruction of them all.

Malory's power consists in his development of this theme,—in his contrasts, his distribution of emphasis,

his romantic play of light and shadow. We shall address ourselves presently to a close study of this development; on broad lines, the sequence can be suggested in a paragraph.

The first seven books, summarizing great reaches in Malory's sources, serve as prologue. They place Arthur on the throne, define the spirit of chivalry, describe its inception and its victories over an England where its high standards have been unknown: farther conquests on the Continent are rather dimly discerned. Sin is present almost at the beginning,—the grim half-conscious sin of Arthur in the begetting of Mordred,—but it is mentioned swiftly, succinctly, may be forgotten if one will. The Table Round, as it gathers its fellowship, is seen in full radiance. In the sixth book, Lancelot, the protagonist, is briefly but adequately placed at the center of the stage. The seventh book, irrelevant in a way to the plot, rightly closes the prologue; it is the Pageant of Sir Gareth, the one picture in the *Morte Darthur* of a chivalry untouched by inward conflict or contrition, victorious, unshadowed, young.

Characters are now placed; outward foes are subdued, chivalry has found itself in its glory. And so to the main action and the body of the work.

First, three long books, eighth, ninth, and tenth, are devoted to the Pageant of Romantic Love. Tristram and his lady are at the center: winsome, insolent, wholly demoralized subjects of the Lord of Terrible Aspect who excuses them from any other allegiance. They are viewed with no expressed disapproval, they feel no touch of compunction. Other lovers gather around them, lovers in every attitude, illustrating from various angles that *Gai Science* which the Middle Ages had codified and exalted.

No breath of criticism is allowed while the maze of these long books is threaded. None the less, in time one wearies of lovers and is ready for change. Into the Hall at Camelot floats the white dove of purity, and Galahad, "seemly and demure" as that dove "and of all manner of good features," advances to present the Pageant of the Grail. That quest no woman may share and after the heats of earthly passion there is refreshment in the moonlit cool which marks the passing of the Holy Thing. The phantom fires which the knights start forth to seek, reduce the clash of arms, the storms of love, to fading dreams. Few attain their quest, and few return from it. Bors and Lancelot wend their way back at the close of the seventeenth book to a broken and enfeebled Logres: a realm in which brave shows of joust and festival are still observed, but in an atmosphere fevered and sad; where suspicion eats into the heart of the political order, where loyalties clash in the open, and the tragic end is clearly imminent. From the eighteenth book to the close, dramatic evolution is swift and firm. Tristram, Galahad, have vanished. Now Gawain emerges from the background where he has been waiting all through the story, carefully subordinated, but always awarded both high honor and sharp blame. Fierce in vindictive fealty to his king and his House, he is a "throw-back" to that Pagan ideal in which fidelity to one's chieftain and vengeance on one's foes were primary virtues. To him is opposed the man of divided will, victim of past sin rather than of present choice, —the Lancelot who during the Grail-books has changed from a mere model of chivalry to a breathing man: Lancelot, truest lover of all sinful knights, Lancelot, who in the Holy Quest surpassed all save Galahad his

son and two others, Lancelot, chief defender and chief destroyer of Arthur's throne and of the Table Round. (3)

In the resultant miseries of civil strife, the ancient sin of Arthur, always lowering thunderously on the horizon, rises to the zenith; and when the storm is over, men may at will dream of the king in his island quiet at Avalon, or weep at Glastonbury by his tomb. Gawain lies penitent and dead. Lancelot has "dried and dwined away" till his soul has been borne heavenward by angels, and Guenevere, praying to the last that she may never see him more in the visage, has been laid to rest beside her lord.

From the conclusion of Malory's book, one would suppose that the land of Logres was one vast monastery devoted to expiation: and this is well. Arthur may return some day. But he will find no Table Round to welcome him; for that gay chivalry which set forth to subdue the land and to establish peace and justice in a Christianized realm, has perished. Through its own weakness it has fallen, disrupted by its noblest passions; and the England that remains can do naught but sing its dirge.

CHAPTER II

THE PROLOGUE TO THE MAIN ACTION

BOOKS I–VII

I

MALORY'S main source in the first four books is the Merlin romance known as the *Suite de Merlin*, and found in the Huth MS. only. In the chronicle tradition which this *Merlin* amplifies, interesting things are told about Arthur's predecessors,—Pendragon his uncle and Uther his father, Vortigern the usurper, Hengist and Horsa. All this Malory omits. He plunges swiftly into the middle of things, and his story opens with the begetting of Arthur, told with all possible brevity. By the fifth chapter, Uther is dead, and Arthur, a grown lad, is chosen king by virtue of the magic sword stuck in the perron or stone; by the seventh he is properly crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the action can begin.

On the whole, the reader may be grateful to miss the delays of the conventional romantic opening. Malory anticipates the modern trick of suddenness; the abrupt beginning gives an impression of haste, of important affairs on hand, not be deferred. The characters are all the more effective because they appear unexplained. One hesitates a little over the advantage of the method in the case of one personage, Merlin. His mysterious

personality dominates these earlier books, but no help to understanding him is offered. From the time of Geoffrey, the tale of this strange son of nun and demon had held, and deservedly, the shuddering fancy. Merlin, the hairy baby, Merlin the wise child, Merlin the protector of Arthur's forbears, who wrought the dragon-banner spitting flame, who brought Stonehenge over from Ireland, had at once terrified and fascinated the generations. Nothing of all this is in Malory. It is hard to imagine his Merlin as babe or child: the sorcerer appears ageless as the wind. Only once a passing hint is given of his origin: Nimue, on whom he was assotted, "feared him because he was a devil's son." His coming is unheralded; but before a dozen pages are done he slips into the narrative: "Well, my lord," says Ulfius to Uther who is pining for Ygraine: "I shall seek Merlin, and he shall do you remedy, that your heart shall be pleased. So Ulfius departed, and by adventure he met Merlin in a beggar's array."[1]

Perhaps such treatment of the figure invests it with more mystery and dread than does the detail of the earlier story. At all events, in general the compression of these first books is not to be regretted. The first matter to dispose of is Arthur's struggle with other British chiefs to get himself recognized and to win control of the land,—a matter that occupies interminable lengths in the original. Malory dismisses it in Book I. Eleven kings rally against Arthur,—malignant, titanic figures, belonging to that elder generation clearly to be distinguished in the *Morte* from the gentler products of developed chivalry, who are more usually dubbed knights than kings. The struggle is protracted, but though several chapters

[1] *Morte Darthur*, Vol. i., 1, p. 6.

succeed each other with the cheery heading, "Yet more of the same battle," any one turning to the original discovers that Malory has abridged it till the story is hardly intelligible. He is so perfunctory along here that the reader is inclined to agree with Merlin, who comes on a great black horse and says to Arthur: "Thou hast never done, has thou not done enough? . . . and it is time to say Ho! For God is wrought with thee, that thou wilt never have done."[1]

So the battle is ended, though rather inconclusively, and Arthur is fairly well settled on his throne. Up to this time the tone of the story has in the main been that of chronicle. Historic allusions are attempted: we waver between Logres the land of story and England the land of fact. The marble stone wherein the magic sword sticks to the hilt, appears in the churchyard of "the greatest church of London, whether it were Paul's or not the French book maketh no mention." There is allusion to a Commons that seems to approve Arthur's election, after which feat it disappears, until, being "new-fangle," it turns to favor Mordred at the end. The English coloring, though faint, is distinct for a little while.

But it fades presently, and as it fades, the chronicle-tone yields wholly to the higher quality of romance. The transition is accomplished through the figure of Arthur,—a figure which gives vitality to all these early books. Later on, Arthur is destined to withdraw into a regal seclusion and to become, if truth be told, somewhat stiff in the joints. Here he is youthful and charming. Nothing could be prettier than the affectionate modesty he shows in the first glimpse of him, when he runs docile home to fetch his foster-brother Kay a sword, pulls the magic blade out of the stone

[1] *Morte Darthur*, i., 17, p. 31

for Kay, and protests horrified when Kay and his foster-father kneel, recognizing him as their king. "Alas," he cries, "my own dear father and brother, why kneel ye to me?"[1] Yet he takes naturally to his rank, and bears him henceforth right kingly, though with refreshing boyish ardor. Chivalry is innate in him, as appears in his magnanimity to his foes, his love of good knights, and above all in his passion for adventure. He refuses to sit in state at Caerlion and wanders forth at will: "And when they heard of his adventures, they marveled that he would jeopard his person so, alone. But all men of worship said it was merry to be under such a chieftain, that would put his person in adventure as other poor knights did."[2]

Arthur can summon dignity enough when he replies to the Roman ambassadors. But in the main, he is a mere eager lad, as when he prefers the sword to the scabbard, or when he scolds Merlin for interrupting his fight with Pellinore. Merlin indeed, who is prettily proud of him, is repeatedly obliged to check him, which he does with more or less decided humor. How merry a defiance Arthur hurls, at the end of the first book, against the giant king Rience, who has insolently purfled a mantle with kings' beards, and demands Arthur's to complete his collection! "Thou mayst see my beard is [illegible] young yet to make a purfle of it," says Arthur, in reply to this "most villainous and lewdest message that ever man heard sent unto a king."[3] Humor does not abound in romance, but there is a dancing gayety to this answer: one hears the loud laughter of the court.

Malory's Arthur, it may be noted, has not lost his old trick of dealing with giants, although these fifteenth-century monsters are as a rule modified into big fierce

[1] *Morte Darthur*, i., 6, p. 12.
[2] *Ibid.*, i., 25, p. 44.
[3] *Ibid.*, i., xxvi., p. 44.

knights, like Carados, who trusses Gawain like a chicken, and bears him away on his saddle. But it is a pleasure to hear of Rience, and to meet once more the authentic monster who has slain Helena and is roasting children on a spit, even if he is less awesome-grim than in the alliterative *Morte*.

So Arthur rides at will through the land, jousting and fighting, after the excellent knight-errant fashion; and exciting things begin to occur. Yet all is not sunshine. Before the end of the book, a shadow dims the landscape: chill is in the air. The young beauty of Arthur's figure is marred by sin, for he is far from stainless, and the loose standards of the time are reflected in his story. In Chapter XIX. of Book I. is introduced the tragic motif, the begetting of Mordred: not the first of Arthur's lapses, but the worst, and the one destined to work the last disaster. Briefly though it is chronicled, a drear romantic terror creeps at this point into the tale. The Questing Beast goes by,—strange creature, connected with the Grail, who haunts the byways of romance. Omens thicken. Merlin speaks plain language to the lad he loves: "Ye have done a thing late that God is displeased with you, for ye have lain by your sister and on her ye have gotten a child that shall destroy you and all the knights of your realm."[1] The shadow passes, but it may not be forgotten. It is shocking to read the cursory remark that Arthur bids the slaying of all children born on May-Day in the vain hope of destroying his son.[2] These are wild times: men groping in the dark are hardly responsible for what they do; for there is as yet no Table Round, there are no vows of chivalry.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, i., 20, p. 37.

[2] In Malory's Source, King Lot's campaign against Arthur is motived by his anger at the supposed death of Mordred.

Meanwhile, the messengers from Rome, demanding tribute, have been scornfully dismissed. Arthur learns his parentage, in a scene not lacking in pathos. The relations of his House are defined; for Gawain and his brothers come to court, with the ill-omened mother, Queen Margawse, and Ygraine comes, bringing with her her daughter Morgan le Fay,—mistress in chief of black magic as opposed to the white magic of Merlin. So by the end of the book, many of the *dramatis personæ* are gathered, and the scene for the drama is laid. Laid in an atmosphere gloomy enough on the whole. The story wavers between chronicle and romance, but romance wins out and it is romance fierce, lawless, shot through with hints of evil magic and far disaster, yet setting and background withal for something youthfully bright, amazingly eager. Arthur stands in the high light at the center,—Arthur encompassed with mystery, stained by sin, yet lovable, kingly, heroic, carrying Excalibur flashing "like thirty torches" in his hand.

II

The king is on the throne; but not till the end of the third book will the Table Round be established and the knights sworn by their oath. Meantime, the necessity for that oath will be made very plain. The second book seems superficially irrelevant to the main action. It tells the sorrowful tale of the brothers, Balin and Balan, a tale which attracted Swinburne to a retelling inferior to the original. From the point of view of romantic art, this book is one of the finest in Malory. It narrates how Balin the misfortunate achieves the sword brought to court by the damosel of Lady Lile;

how with this sword he cuts off in full court the head of the Lady of the Lake who had slain his mother[1]: how, exiled by Arthur, he wins back to favor by capturing the haughty giant, King Rience, and how he passes through many adventures, always well-intentioned, always doomed to disaster; till at the close, in anonymous conflict with his loved brother Balan, both fall, killed by each other's swords.

This story is one of the best examples of Malory's method. Apparently told wholly for its own sake, it yet serves a double purpose in the general scheme. First, it lifts the story decisively and finally from the atmosphere of chronicle, where interest centers on the event, into an atmosphere of romance where interest centers on the emotion. We are not ready yet to live in this difficult air; but it is well to know what is waiting, well to realize thus early how transitory is that spirit of superficial adventure which has marked the inception of Arthur's reign. Second, the book enhances the impression of the crying need for the work which Arthur and chivalry have to do. For it shows us deep disorder and moral confusion obtaining everywhere. In no wise could the anarchistic condition of the realm be more vividly conveyed than through Balin's miserable story, as he gropes in a world of no established standards, where the finest purpose and the truest instincts of untutored honor do but lead a man into ever worse blunders and failures.

Balin is the first of Malory's strong character studies: a tragic figure, always entirely noble in purpose, always doing the wrong thing. Alone among the assembled knights, including Arthur, he is proved by the sword

[1] In the *Suite*, the source which Malory usually follows, it is the brother who has been killed. The "ordinary" *Merlin* gives the mother.

test to be a passing good man of his hands and of his deeds, and of a gentle strain of father and mother side, and also a clean knight without villainy or treachery and without treason. The chivalric ideal thus begins to define itself. Its basic traits are aristocratic origin and courage, and that high virtue of loyalty which is central in the mediæval standard.

Yet in spite of these qualities, Balin blunders from the beginning. Note his conduct in striking off the head of the Lady of the Lake. He is simply following that law of vengeance which is the law of honor for all primitive people. She was the falsest lady alive and she was the cause that his mother had been burnt. Here is provocation enow! None the less, because he lost his self-control and did the deed in Arthur's court, he has sinned against *mesure*. The dignity and the honor of the court are violated, and Balin sets forth under his king's displeasure, only to pass from misfortune to misfortune. When he would do his very best, he is always at his worst. In lawful fight he slays the arrogant Lanceor, but with horrified pity sees Lanceor's lady Colombe kill herself for grief upon the body. He offers gallant escort to a weakling knight, and behold! that knight riding under his escort is slain by Garlon,[1] who, dastard fashion, rides invisible.

Here if anywhere reprisals would seem righteous, and Balin vowing to avenge his friend on this unseen foe commands sympathy. Yet this very quest leads to mysterious sin and final doom. For it is in the Grail castle, whither the scene is suddenly and strangely

[1] This Garlon may = Gurgalon, a cannibal king in *Perceval le Gallois*. Gorlagon in Welsh = a werewolf. See Kittredge, *Arthur and Gorlagon*, Harv. Studies.

shifted, that Garlon is found. Here, where reality reigns, he is no longer hidden from sight; and Balin, leaping up in noble rage, kills him,—impelled not only by the desire to avenge, but by the wish to secure his blood to heal a lad who can not be whole till he have of that knight's blood. Now the brother of Garlon is Pellam, the Grail king: he in his turn seeks to avenge his evil kin, and rushes on Balin's spear, only to receive that dolorous stroke through which kingdoms are laid waste and the whole world languishes. It is one of the strangest stories in Malory, and a peculiar explanation of the Dolorous Stroke which constantly recurs in Grail-romance. But one simple moral is obvious: discipline in that stringent law of hospitality which was the first necessity for decent and secure civilization. This law must be preserved at all hazards: Balin has violated it, and punishment must ensue. So he departs to meet his doom. And from now on the tone of somber apprehension is superbly rendered. He finds "the people dead, slain on every side. And all that were alive cried: O Balin thou hast caused great damage in these countries; for the dolorous stroke thou gavest unto King Pellam, three countries are destroyed, and doubt not but the vengeance will fall on thee at the last. When Balin was past those countries he was passing fayne."[1] But Balin is still "fey": seeking to befriend a knight by showing him the falsity of his lady, he but goads the poor man to self-destruction. The scenes, the words, have the same unforgetable quality of weird horror that pervades Browning's *Childe Roland*.

And within three days he came by a cross, and thereon were letters of gold written, that said, It is not for no knight alone to ride toward this castle. Then saw he an old hoar

[1] *Morte Darthur*, ii., 16, p. 65.

gentleman coming toward him, that said, Balin the Savage, thou passest thy bounds to come this way, therefore turn again and it will avail thee. And he vanished away anon; and so he heard an horn blow as it had been the death of a beast. That blast, said Balin, is blown for me, for I am the prize and yet am I not dead.[1]

He is now welcomed to a gay feast, where knights and ladies greet him with fair semblance; but malignant suggestion increases. Bidden to joust with a knight, he knows that his hour is struck, and welcomes it. Thus Balin the doomed meets his brother Balan in mortal combat; and when the fight is over and the pathos calmed in death, comes Merlin to bury them.

For the wizard wanders stealthily through these adventures, ever hinting through symbols and dark sayings at their relation with what is to come. The tale is full of prescient hints of greater tragedy to be. Before the dead bodies of Lanceor and his love Colombe appears, of all people, King Mark of Cornwall, to mourn their fate and build their tomb; whereupon Merlin sardonically informs him that on the tomb are written in golden letters the names of two great knights and truest lovers who shall fight a good fight here some day: they are Lancelot of the Lake and Tristram of Lyonesse. On the tomb of the knight slain by Garlon is the grim prediction that Gawain shall avenge his father's death on Pellinore: and by Balin's own tomb is a couch on which it drives a man mad to lie. It is the sword of Balin, the unlucky knight who died foiled and morally defeated, which on a later morning is to float in its marble stone down the river to Camelot, and to be achieved by the stainless Galahad. With this same

[1] *Morte Darthur*, ii., 17, p. 66.

sword, so Merlin foretells, the final tragedy shall be fulfilled and Lancelot shall kill Gawain.

Frequent suggestion of the Grail-interest occurs through the book, as where Balin learns of the Sick Lady who can be healed only by the blood of a pure maiden,—she for whom Perceval's sister is later to die. Are we meant never to forget during the long developments to follow, that the Dolorous Stroke has been given and that a curse rests on the land? Must we be reminded at the outset, even if only in veiled symbol, that the deeper issues of Arthurian story are worked out, not on the plane of nature, but in a world unseen? At all events, this book, very fine in itself, plays also a distinct part as prelude to the main action. It leads out into the full romantic atmosphere. It shows the dark possibilities involved in the clash of chivalric impulse with natural passions. Above all, it emphasizes the desperate helplessness of humanity even at its best, when moving in a social order where old standards of honor no longer satisfy, but where the sanctions and ideals competent to meet the needs of the age have as yet found no outward code.

III

Bk. 3. Book III. is a short book, but of great importance. It carries on with skill both the story and the theme. At the outset Arthur wins Guenevere, receives the Round Table as her dower, and weds her simply, briefly, with none of the protracted complications which gather in the Source round the substitution of her half-sister. These are not without interest; they throw light rather needed for understanding Malory's own story, on the relations of Gawain with court and

queen, and on the character of Arthur, and they include some good stories. But they are irrelevant to Malory's central purpose, and he dismisses the marriage with one brief stroke, characteristic of his genius, more effective than all the detail in his sources. Merlin, he says, "warned the king covertly that Guenevere was not wholesome for him to take to wife."[1] Again the tragic intimation in the midst of youthful promise! Nor does there lack a hint of light beyond, for, "So he turned his tale to the adventures of Sangreal."[2]

The stage is now fully set. King and queen reign side by side, courteous regal figures, from whom radiates an all-attractive light; and to the magnet of this light come the great knights, the great adventures. It is a book of quests: the quest of Tor, the quest of Pellinore, the quest of Gawain. Fine stories in themselves, but more than that; for the theme already suggested is developed through them. It is the theme of the failure of the knights for lack of a restraining code, the imperative need for a standard through which the confused instincts of nascent chivalry may be focused and preserved. At the end of the book this standard is to be established once and for all: the great Oath is to be sworn.

The pleasant story of young Tor is the first episode after the marriage. It clinches the recognition of the fact already hinted in Balin's story, that the ideal presented is exclusively for gentlemen. Reputed son of Aries the cowherd, Tor is brought to court by his despairing foster-father to be made a knight of, because forsooth he is good for nothing else! "This child will not labor for me, for anything that I or my wife may do, but always he will be shooting or casting

[1] *Morte Darthur.*
[2] *Ibid.*, iii., 1, p. 71.

darts, and glad for to see battles and to behold knights, and always day and night he desireth of me to be made a knight."[1] Even the distracted Aries it will be observed, assumes the scorn for labor to be entirely praiseworthy! Blood will tell,—there is the moral. For Merlin is at hand to inform the court that Tor is the son of a king.

No less a king than Pellinore. And Pellinore himself is an important personage throughout this book, a great figure of that older generation which is soon to vanish from the scene. He is the chief of a haughty clan, involved from the first in deadly feud with the family of King Lot. For the next thing which Malory has to accomplish in his seemingly artless narrative is to indicate the tenacious enmities between diverse groups of Arthur's vassals. These enmities persevere throughout beneath the surface of the epic; they are the leading secondary causes of the final disaster. In depicting them, romance draws very near to suggesting the actual conditions of feudalism, the turbulent jealousies among great nobles, jealousies held under, loosely or firmly, by fealty to a common overlord.

Lot has already disappeared: Pellinore has killed him: and this act has inaugurated the feud. Jealousy enhances the lust for revenge; for at the very feast where Gawain, Lot's son, is made knight according to Arthur's promise, Tor, the young aspirant, is knighted before him, and presently Merlin formally establishes Pellinore in the seat of honor next to the Siege Perilous; whereat the new-made Sir Gawain sat in great envy, and proposed to slay him out of hand with a sword that was passing trenchant. Gaheris, a brother always of more tranquil temper, dissuades him,—partly because

[1] *Morte Darthur*, iii., 3, p. 73.

he wants to share the vengeance, and partly for the finer reason that it were better to do the deed out of court, lest they "trouble this high feast."[1] Gawain lets himself be persuaded; the dawn is seen of that self-control which is to be one of the most necessary and also most precarious achievements of chivalry. Where Balin had gratified his vergeful impulse without scruple in the open court, Gawain refrains. But the enmity between the Houses is accented, and though it will often sink out of sight, occasion will arise to remember it.

The Quests now follow, and they deepen the impression of the disorder against which the new conception of courtesy, honor, and mercy must strive. As might be expected, it is Gawain who points the moral most sharply. He now, first among the greater personages of the story, emerges into the light,—one of the master figures in Malory, and, so far as material for judgment is at hand, largely an original creation.

As already shown, Gawain holds, being Arthur's nephew, the official post of honor at the court, and he is doggedly devoted to both Arthur and the queen. Noble elements abound in him; yet his native harshness and vindictiveness are already patent. These are effectively emphasized in his first recorded adventure. Albeit besought as a knight and a gentleman, he refuses mercy to a vanquished foe, Ablamar of the Marshes, who has killed his hounds; and by misfortune he smites off the head of the knight's distraught lady who tries to intervene between them. The episode is effective, and new ideas shine out strikingly in the rebukes administered to Gawain. The first is by his brother Gaheris: "Alas, said Gaheris, that is foully and shamefully done, that shame shall never from you;

[1] *Morte Darthur*, iii., 4, p. 75.

also ye should give mercy unto them that ask mercy, for *a knight without mercy is without worship*."[1]

It is a great phrase,—far indeed from heathendom and the old days when vengeance was the first of virtues. Others repeat it till it rings in the ears like a refrain; Gawain is forced to bear the dead lady with him to Camelot; and arrived there, his sentence is sealed by Guenevere, who is felt throughout these early books as a gentle and restraining no less than queenly presence. Her action moreover gives the clue to the attitude, which Gawain is henceforth to maintain, of one especially vowed to ladies' service—an echo of old traditions skillfully utilized in the more modern character-study: "And there by ordinance of the queen there was set a quest of ladies on Sir Gawain, and they judged him forever while he lived to be with all ladies and to fight for their quarrels, and that ever he should be courteous, and never to refuse mercy to him that asketh mercy. Thus was Gawain sworn upon the Four Evangelists."[2] Thus he takes his place in the Pageant: a knight honestly striving to conform to the standard to which he has been sworn, succeeding in no small measure, as many episodes will show, yet with vindictive native impulses which it would be a mistake to forget.

Tor's quest is less interesting; the point of it appears to be direct contrast with Gawain's. As Gawain had refused mercy when due, Tor is forced by law of justice and by truth to his plighted word, to execute a cruel sentence when he would fain have spared. For chivalry is stern enough, and its song is of Mercy indeed but of Judgment too. Nor is there anything mechanical in the application of its rule.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, iii., 7, p. 78.

[2] *Ibid.*, iii., 8, p. 80.

The story of Pellinore brings out a fresh aspect of chivalry. Pellinore is so hot on his appointed quest, which is not one of prime importance, that he refuses to heed the appeal of a damosel who calls him to her aid in the Name of Christ; and therefore later he is sorely punished. For passing that way again, he finds her eaten of wild beasts, all but her head with its fair yellow hair, and that grieved King Pellinore sore, for much he cast his heart on the visage. And well he might, for when he has borne that piteous head to court, it is discovered that the damosel was his own daughter. At times, the knights seem to take their leisure in the fulfilling of their quests, and to be drawn aside by any adventure that the road may offer. But scrutiny reveals a fairly definite code of values. The knight who loiters unduly may indeed be sore rebuked; yet no less blameworthy is he who is "so furious in his quest" that sense of proportion and selection are lost. Quick response must be made to the appeal of weakness though one's legitimate business be hindered thereby!

The time is ripe for the Oath that formally inaugurates chivalry, and binds the knights as with a golden chain. First sworn on the High Feast of Pentecost, the vow shall be renewed year by year on that same day. It is the Festival of the Spirit, the day of Pentecostal fire, whereon the Church Catholic bears her witness to the Holy Power that supplants the life of nature by a grace above nature.[1] The tale to come may often prove secular enough,—light in morals, reckless, fierce. But deep at the heart of chivalry is a religious dedication, and the vow of knighthood possesses an all but sacramental quality.

[1] It has been suggested that this Feast may be the Christian equivalent of Beltane, the heathen sun-festival on May 1.

Then the king stablished all his knights, . . . and charged them never to do outrageosity nor murder, and always to flee treason; also, by no means to be cruel, but to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of King Arthur forevermore; and always to do ladies, damosels, and gentlewomen succor, upon pain of death. Also, that no man take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no law, nor for no world's goods. Unto this were all the knights sworn of the Table Round, both old and young. And every year were they sworn at the high feast of Pentecost.[1]

Self-restraint; mercy, helpfulness to women; justice above the letter of the law; and ever loyalty,—the resolute fleeing of treason, that Judas-sin, that sin of Lucifer, profoundest in the mediæval Hell. To realize the ennobling and softening influence of this pledge, it suffices to recall the images of honor in old heathen days, as presented by an author like Saxo Grammaticus. The new ideal was a great experiment. The rest of the *Morte Darthur* is devoted to showing how it worked.

IV

Merrily life begins, and it can not be said that the lofty ideals of chivalry are much in evidence at the outset. Action occupies us rather; black magic and white,—mostly black, for the evil pranks of Morgan le Fay occupy much of Book IV.; meaningless episodes told for pure fun, everywhere and always the eager spirit of adventure. After all, this is the impelling force. The moral ideal, for a time at least, is rather a restraining than a creating element; what creates chivalry and the romantic temper, is the amazed sense

Bk 4.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, iii., 15, p. 89.

of the freshness of the world. To explore, to achieve, this is the universal thirst. Talk about the Song of the Open Road! It is the people of the romances who know how to sing it.

"In wonder begins the soul of man," says George Macdonald, "in wonder it ends: and investigation fills up the interspace." Strangeness added to beauty is the essence of romance, says Walter Pater. Here is wonder, here is strangeness, to satisfy the heart's desire. Happening of a water's side in a dark night, it is pleasant to see a little welcoming ship, richly behanged with cloth of silk, and suddenly illumined by an hundred torches set upon all the sides of the ship-boards. Knights riding at random may well rejoice to come across damosels crowned with circlets of gold or flowers, who sit waiting for them at the head of a stream in a deep valley full of stones, and forthwith lead them forth on sundry adventures. Sometimes the marvel is horrible, and none the less fascinating for that reason. The richest mantle that ever was seen in that court, set as full of precious stones as one might stand by another, is offered to Arthur; but when put upon the damosel that brought it, she falls down dead and burnt to coals. Life is shocking often, violent and perilous always; but never for one minute is it other than absorbing.

Yet through all but entire haphazard of event, the plot progresses; and a somewhat purifying, disciplining, now and again makes itself felt. Wickedness, above all the supreme wickedness of treachery, begins to look blacker, now there is clear light to contrast it with. The atrocious intrigues of Morgan le Fay, the outrageous behavior of Gawain, who disgraces himself in this fourth book in a way hard to forget, offset the

magnanimity and high courage of Arthur and others. Brief artful touches accomplish much in revealing the characters. Kay, for instance, so crusty an old fellow that even Arthur's early promise to his father hardly justifies his honorable position as seneschal, here has his chance and takes it. Arthur is hard bestead by five kings who are burning and harrowing all the land, and prudence counsels retirement. But Kay vows to slay two kings with his own hand, and fulfills his promise, turning the tide of fortune: wherefore a seat at the Table Round is his, and high commendation from Guenevere: "For ye spake a great word," said the queen, "and fulfilled it worshipfully."[1] Religion is not forgotten; the battle past, the king kneels down and thanks God meekly. King Bagdemagus, riding forth in grief because Tor is preferred before him, finds an holy herb that was a branch of the San Graal, and no knight found such tokens but he were a good liver. Courtesy, generosity, gentleness, abound; the sacred sense of fellowship is growing.

Above all, a great abstract term begins to shine with increasing light. Gawain betrays his friend Sir Pelleas with hateful deliberation, and Pelleas, finding Gawain asleep in the arms of his own love Ettard, grieves so that hardly he can hold himself on his horse for sorrow, and is sore tempted to kill him. Natheless he says to himself, "Though this knight be never so false, I will never slay him sleeping, for I will never destroy *the high order of knighthood*."[2] Arthur, crying out, "I had liefer to die with honor than to live with shame,"[3] was "so full of knighthood that knightly he endured" the pain of wounds. "Madam," said Sir Uwaine, "they

[1] *Morte Darthur*, iv., 3, p. 94.
[2] *Ibid.*, iv., 22, p. 121.
[3] *Ibid.*, iv., 10, p. 103.

are to blame, for they do against the high order of knighthood, and the oath that they made." "I make a vow unto knighthood," is the solemn and recurrent phrase. When an ideal is consciously invoked like this, for purposes of incentive and rebuke, society has outgrown barbarism.

At the beginning of Book IV., Merlin vanishes, shut by Nimue in that stone prison whence his voice still sounds at times to sensitive ears. His mystic figure so dominates one's memories of the *Morte Darthur* that it is hard to remember that he is beguiled and dismissed from the scene at the very inception of the action. This is the case however; and the first chapter of the book is an example of Malory's way of reducing long passages to the merest sketch. In a page, Merlin foretells his own end, journeys oversea to the land of Benwick where King Ban is fighting King Claudas, sees Queen Elaine and the young Lancelot, cheers the queen by predicting the child's future greatness, and returns, to fall helpless under Nimue's spell. Such a chapter has no literary value; but it does show Malory's capacity for succinctness.

Glamour however does not die with Merlin. The entertaining wiles of Morgan le Fay occupy ten chapters of the book. Malory makes strangely little of this lady. She seems to be cast for the villain of the piece, and at this point she is deliberately placed in the center; but her wicked attempts are all frustrated, and she disappears, except for occasional mischief-making in the sub-action, till the mourning barge with the three queens plays its rôle at the very end in the dubious rescuing of Arthur. Is it that the play of magic, bewitching as it is, must yield to Malory's ardent perception that human forces suffice unassisted to produce tragedy? Is the subordination of Morgan an inter-

esting witness to the humanizing of romance? Her shape-shifting when she transforms herself into a great stone is suggestive evidence of her ancient origin; but despite her subtle wiles the day of supernatural control is done. Her thwarted intrigues soon fade from memory, and the adventures of Gawain, Uwaine, and Marhaus lead out into a less dazing region.

At this point another survival is recorded, the waxing and waning of Gawain's strength with the passage of the sun. But Gawain is none the less as human a person as Macbeth or Iago. His adventures with Pelleas almost serve to set our contempt toward him for all time, yet should perhaps rather be taken as indications of the loose morals and low standards which it was the object of chivalry to oppose. The Uwaine adventure has no special point. In earlier romance, the Ywains are glorious knights; in Malory only the name survives. As for Sir Marhaus, the most interesting thing about him is the slight connection established by his figure with the Tristram story; for the young Tristram shall later win his first spurs in fighting with this Irish knight. Marhaus, oddly enough, as his old name Le Morolt implies, may once have been a sea-monster; but he is a perfectly decorous and normal person by the time he wanders into the pages of Malory.

It is a youthful world, that of Book IV.: its boy-king, unburdened by the cares of state, still puts his person in light-hearted jeopardy. But this state of things can not last. Those grave ambassadors from Rome, who have already appeared for a moment in the first book, present themselves at court, olive-branches in hand, demanding tribute. Instantly the tone changes, —becomes political, dignified. The influence of the

chronicle is once more patent,—the fifth book being based on the middle English alliterative *Morte* which in turn rests on Geoffrey. Speeches are made, remotely echoing Tacitus and Livy. Presently a sober host sets forth on the Roman campaigns, which occupy the book; they leave Arthur at the end, not only ruler of Logres but vaguely designated as emperor of the known world. The campaign is fought automatically and the empire is won in a fairly casual way. The touches of romance vouchsafed originally by Geoffrey are still with few exceptions carefully preserved. It is pleasing to any right-minded person to learn that Lucius the Roman emperor has fifty giants engendered of fiends for his body-guard; the dolorous tale of Helena still awakes a shudder, though the splendid story of Arthur's fight with the monster cat of the Lake of Lausanne is lost. Priamus, the Saracen knight, still heals himself and Gawain with his phial full of the waters of Paradise, and primitive traits in the story antedate even the fifth-century Arthur who may really have fought with Romans. Yet to find this chronicle-material incorporated in the full swing of romance is to realize more keenly than ever how inferior it is in charm. The fifth book is the dullest of the *Morte Darthur*.

V

During these Roman wars, the main characters of the story are placed permanently in position. An allusion reveals that Tristram is already at the court of Mark, and lover of La Beale Isoud: and Lancelot, seen hitherto only in one glimpse of a little lad at the court of his father, King Ban, is now a knight of great

prowess, fighting the Roman campaign, accompanied by his cousins, and, as a hint would imply, the lover of Guenevere.

In the sixth book, in which Malory turns to the prose *Lancelot* for his material, this real protagonist of the Arthuriad at last takes his proper place. Preliminaries are over. Arthur has conquered his enemies at home and abroad. The fellowship of the Table Round has enacted its own laws and gained a fair stage on which to play. The next necessity is the advent of the hero; Book VI. is accordingly the Pageant of Sir Lancelot,—a pageant somewhat disappointing, for it is as mechanical as any creaking show that ever graced or disgraced the mediæval stage.

The book opens with a summary of the briefest, presenting in a paragraph the situation "soon after that King Arthur was come from Rome into England":[1] and Lancelot and his cousin Lionel ride forth promptly on adventures bound. This short book comprises all that Malory cares to use from at least two thirds of the immense French romance; and how far he is from slavish imitation is evident if one notes the careful selection of a few cogent and expressive episodes. It is time for the hero to appear; but Malory's general scheme and clear intention is to subordinate the earlier to the later portions of the story. The book is therefore a capital instance of conscientious and deliberate compression: it suffices in itself to refute the idea of haphazard copying, and shows clearly how the idea of the whole controls the choice of detail.

Two reasons may be given for the somewhat cold and wooden result. The first is that, being mainly concerned just how to keep his material within bounds,

[1] *Morte Darthur*, vi., 1, p. 152.

Malory has not a free hand. He is giving a synopsis as it were of chivalric standards, illustrated by the first perfect knight who has come within ken, and the schematic character of the story hampers him. The second is the fact that Malory took his Lancelot as he found him. It has already been shown that the conventionality of the figure is partly due to its origin. Lancelot never knew, like Gawain, Tristram, Perceval, a long life in the unfolding imagination of the race: he is direct creation. When he sprang into being in the twelfth century, chivalry had already developed an artifice of its own which crystallized passion into etiquette. Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* inaugurated the formal and lifeless Lancelot tradition, the prose romances continued it, Malory inherited it. His treatment in this sixth book is on the familiar lines, his incidents being chosen to illustrate as many aspects of Lancelot's perfection as possible. Lancelot repels the allurements of sorceress-queens fascinated by his beauty, he defends the honor of his lady Guenevere, he rescues his brother knights when captive, he fights like a "wood lyon" in tournament and joust, ever yielding honor to others when they least deserve it, he even meets the supernatural tests of the Chapel Perilous. He slays giants, fulfills predictions, wins the greatest name of any knight in the world. He is consistently courteous, loyal, bold, gentle; and he is tiresome. There are effective episodes in the book: there is no characterization.

Lancelot is most alive when expressing the spirit of adventure; when for instance, he sees a fair green court, "and thither he dressed him, for there him thought was a fair place to fight in."[1] "Why should I not prove adventures? said Sir Lancelot, for that cause come I

[1] *Morte Darthur*, vi., 10, p. 166.

hither."[1] The authentic thrill is in such words; and this irrepressible enjoyment of a morning of the world saves the book from utter tedium.

He is least alive, one regrets to state, in his relations with Guenevere. These relations are scrupulously defined, and the phrases of *L'amour Courtois* fall pat from the hero's lips; but in the course of this book he does not once meet his lady. Indeed, his attitude toward her appears so formal that no one would think of its affording occasion for repentance. Traces linger in it of that type of connection so usual in the Middle Ages, so at variance with modern ideas. Lancelot is by many years the junior of the queen. As already noted, he was originally the ideal representative of the young squire, dedicated to the service of a gracious châtelaine whose favor he must slowly win by carefully prescribed degrees: it is a relation which Tristram never bore to Iseult! Lancelot and Guenevere leave it behind, carried by the wind of their passion out into the wide waters of reality; but thus they began, and thus in the sixth book they are conceived. The reader of this book recalls the interminable negotiations in the prose *Lancelot*, and far from regretting that he does not find Galeotto and the first kiss,[2] is grateful to Malory for sparing him the most frigid token ever given by one model of deportment to another.

Malory, to be sure, blurs the discrepancy of age so that careless reading does not apprehend it. Not only here, but systematically he softens the fairly clear-cut but absurd outlines of the old chronology. This chronology demands consideration, although superficially there seems very little to consider, wild

[1] *Morte Darthur*, vi., 7, p. 161.

[2] See note p. 131.

confusion appearing to reign. Lancelot, not yet born when his father Ban comes to Arthur's aid in Book I., a child when Merlin sees him in Book IV.,—Arthur and Guenevere being by this time safely wedded,—holds his due place as a strong knight during the Roman wars, and is taken for granted in Book VI. as approved lover of the queen and flower of the court. The story now proceeds on a basis of calm impossibilities. Generations are born, mature and die; the sons and sons' sons of the earlier brood of knights appear; while Lancelot still loves as hot as ever, and Guenevere,—let no profane touch rest upon her years,—still moves in freshest prime, "the vision of beauty among the passions of men." It is well to be overswept once for all by the full bewilderment of Malory's chronology.

The moment one tries to analyze, one is tempted to say, and be done with it, that this world of romance subsists in an eternal Now. Yet this is not quite true. Recurrent glimpses are caught of a tremendous past, and the drama moves toward an expected future, though on a scale so vast as to elude our measures. The world of romance is the world of time.

And a good excuse can be offered for the romantic method. In its placid disregard of those time-conventions under which the race more or less accidentally happens to exist, romance has chosen its own way of solving the eternal problem of art,—the reconciliation of design with detail. No one life-span would suffice for working out the mighty forces which art has to show; therefore art will elongate and expand at will, magnifying the time-scale till the literal-minded reader is reduced to scoffing or despair. The contrast between the depth and complexity of the human drama, and the ridiculously short allowance of our

mean little seventy or eighty years, forever maddens and insults us. To disregard this arbitrary measure, to give lives space enough, is to reach a larger reality. Such reality is assuredly felt as we enter with a sense of relief that world of romance where time has not indeed ceased to be, but is measured not by moments but by experience. Emancipate from the casual bonds of lower realism, romance achieves a higher; for it can present in calmness, free from terrified expectation of "the blind Fury with her accursed shears," the outworking of destiny and purpose, the gradual sure unfolding of effect from cause.

Let it also be remembered that Malory is giving more than the story of individuals, he is condensing the epic of a civilization. He has to render the rise, the triumph, the disintegration, of Christian chivalry. There is no need to quarrel with his art if again and again his knights become symbols rather than fleshly men. Suddenly, one will loom larger, vaguer, before our eyes, no longer a person, but a phase of the chivalric ideal. Then we see, not Tristram but the immortal lover, not Bors, but fidelity, not Arthur, but kingship absolute. With such personifications, time has no concern.

Even from the point of view of concrete story, moreover, the slow movement of fate is often effective. There is this degree of verisimilitude to the treatment, —that mature men and women are more subject than boys and girls to the full force of the passions. The intensity of experience may fade as life advances, but quite as often it deepens. Many a person is barely ready at fifty, at sixty, at seventy even, to drain the cup of ambition, of hatred, of sacrificial devotion, yes,—of love. Conventionality draws a veil over the

tumults of later life; but it is by a sound instinct that Malory finds his people more interesting toward the end of their careers than the beginning, and curtails the earlier portions of his sources to place emphasis on the later.

Reading him closely, development is seen, not only in the whole scheme of things, but in more than one important personality. This is especially true in the case of his protagonist, Lancelot. In this sixth book, he is the youthful knight, lightly adoring his lady according to the rules, with never a hint of genuine feeling. Later, in the full heats of middle life, he will come alive, and convince us of his greatness, not by his reputation, but by his words and deeds. It is in the Grail-books that the process is accomplished; there he is searched and found wanting, and through his touching penitence no less than through the ardor of his conflicting desires, is revealed a very man, a very brother. Increasingly careworn, perfect in relation to the younger knights who lean on him, endowed with a deeper power to attract than youth can know, he will be shown wearily faithful to a sin so ancient that after the fashion of ancient sins it has almost transformed itself into a virtue. At the end, his portrait possesses the vitality which only the great creations of the human mind can boast.

Meanwhile, the sixth book leaves him the cynosure of all eyes, the central figure of the court and the story. But we turn with pleasure from his complacent excellencies to the next book, and the Pageant of one of the most endearing knights,—Sir Gareth.

VI

These introductory books conclude with a tale that shows the ideal of chivalry at its very best, dewy-

fresh in the morning of the great Arthurian day. It is a tale complete in itself, but also, as so often happens in Malory's art, necessary to the theme and intimately related to the evolution of the main plot.

The first function is the more obvious. For in the character and career of Gareth, all the qualities of the perfect knight, carefully suggested up to this point by both positive and negative means, find at last complete expression. What Malory did perfunctorily and formally in the preceding book, here does itself, so to speak, by the mere *élan* of the narrative. Malory is no longer concerned with compressing and preparing. He works with a free hand, lets himself go, and enjoys himself hugely.

Nobody knows where he got this charming story. It resembles the group represented in middle English by *Libeaus Desconnus*, in Italian by *Carduino*, in French by *Le Bel Inconnu*, and in German by *Wigalois*, a group however in which the hero is not brother but son to Gawain. The contrast between this Gareth story and *Libeaus Desconnus* is interesting. *Libeaus* it will be remembered is highly composite. The poem opens with the Perceval *Enfances*, ends with the Serpent kiss, and even in the central portion where the episodes have a rough resemblance to the Gareth story, includes the adventure of Violette and the giants and a Sparrow Hawk tournament recalling the *Erec*. Rich in incident, the poem is virtually devoid of character-drawing. In Malory, the proportion is reversed. The story of Gareth and Linette is straightforward and uncomplicated; while it is in itself a capital tale, the personality of the young knight is the secret of its charm.

It is a happy book, fine and clean, though with no

hint of spiritual things, and little intensity of emotion. The pure excitement of living runs in the veins of the young knight, as in the veins of Arthur himself, of Gawain, Lancelot, Kay, and all the company. From the moment when Gareth appears at court leaning in sham helplessness on his servant and demanding the strange boon of meat to eat in the kitchen, his large shapely hands and his great personal beauty suggest his possession of the first requisite to knighthood, noble birth; and his disguise only renders his aristocratic qualities more shining. They become increasingly evident as the book goes on. Gareth is more alive than the Lancelot of the preceding book and less sullied than his brother Gawain. He is a perfect example of a chivalry neither dragged down by lower traditions nor distraught by inner conflicts.

His magnetism is not chiefly due to the propriety with which he performs all expected exploits, —smites giants, frees damosels, wins tourneys and battles,—though he engages in all these pursuits with a convincing zest possible only in the mediæval morning. He charms because his conduct spontaneously illustrates the new code of honor point by point, not in copy-book fashion like a set pattern but with the freshness of unconscious living. His proud satisfaction in refusing to depend on his rank for entrance to court, his disguise as a kitchen knave, his patience under the insolence of rough-tongued Kay, his self-restraint while lashed by the words of the damosel Linet whom he is trying to serve, are pretty instances of that temperance and self-control which are as important as courage in the make-up of a Christian knight. Let none of these qualities be confused with a mean spirit however: not only does Gareth all the time pri-

vately enjoy the joke of his disguise; he delightfully informs his damosel, when at last she is forced to admire him and make amends, that he thanks her for her abuse, which by heating his blood has doubled his prowess!

That prowess goes without question, and however *blasé* the reader may be over heroes who win facile victories against tremendous odds, there is a dare-devil ardor in the book which thrills him with pleasure when the black, the red, the blue, the green knight are successively overcome. This may be because Beaumains or Gareth, grows better and better known through his days of fighting. It is not surprising to find that he has a clever tongue in his head. So far, Malory's personages have had little to say for themselves. In the earlier and more political portions of the story, long speeches are made. Now and again a phrase of Merlin or Balin penetrates to the quick. Young Lancelot always says the proper thing. But as a rule, narrative is more developed up to this point than dramatic power. Malory is capable, however, of very spirited dialogue, and it is in this book that his gift at it begins to appear:

> And whether that I be a gentleman born or none, I let you wit, fair damosel, I have done you gentleman's service, and peradventure better service yet will I do or I depart from you. Alas, she said, fair Beaumains, forgive me all that I have missaid or done against thee. With all my heart, said he, I forgive it you, for ye did nothing but as ye should do, for all your evil words pleased me; and damosel, said Beaumains, syne it liketh you to say thus fair unto me, wit ye well it gladdeth my heart greatly, and now meseemeth there is no knight living but I am able enough for him.[1]

[1] *Morte Darthur*, vii., 11, p. 197.

Admirable in war and in good-fellowship, Gareth is no less satisfactory when it comes to love-making. He is a lover of his own time, not of ours. Tennyson characteristically insisted on a modern sentimental arrangement of his love-affairs, and tried to wed him to Linet. That lively damosel would never have been his mate, however, according to mediæval ideas; for we shall greatly err if we imagine that all these damosels met in company with errant knights are sweethearts of their protectors. The etiquette of that relation is given in a passage already quoted from Chrétien.[1] No! The proper love for Gareth is not Linet, but her sister Liones the lady whom he rides to rescue. Knowing her to be his destiny, he is immediately seized with the appropriate emotions when he sees her from afar.

Sir, said the damosel Linet unto Sir Beaumains, look ye be glad and light, for yonder is your deadly enemy, and at yonder window is my lady, my sister, Dame Liones. Where, said Beaumains. Yonder, said the damosel, and pointed with her finger. That is truth, said Beaumains, she beseemeth afar the fairest lady that ever I looked upon and truly, he said, I ask no better quarrel than now for to do battle, for truly she shall be my lady and for her I will fight. And ever he looked up to the window with glad countenance. And the lady Lionesse made curtesy to him down to the earth, with holding up both hands.

A pretty scene and a true love at first sight: does not Gareth, having conquered his foe, wallow and writhe all night for love of the lady of the castle? Nevertheless, castle windows are high and eyesight has its limitations. The emotion seems a trifle con-

[1] See p. 50.

[2] *Morte Darthur*, vii., 16, p. 204.

ventional when it is discovered a little later that he does not recognize his love when he meets her face to face! At this point magic gets into the tale, and the wiles of Linet to hold the lovers apart, the ring given by Liones that changes the color of Gareth's armor, the tone, the devices, all belong to the earliest stratum of romance, an epoch removed by centuries from the later phases of the Lancelot story. The outlook is the same as that of Marie de France, innocent enough to a fancy that has followed without undue seriousness the pleasant game of courtly love, but lacking in depth.

The whole book differs so widely from Malory's usual manner that the conjecture may be hazarded that his source if discovered would prove to be no work rehandled by successive generations, but rather some genuine twelfth-century poem. The book reads like a companion to Chrétien's *Erec;* it suggests the early poetry, in its uncomplicated narrative, its analysis of sentiment, its tone so glad and light. Above all, the detail is extraordinarily fresh. It contradicts entirely what has been said about Malory's lack of visualizing power. There is a play of color in this story of Gareth, such as can only be equaled in Chrétien and is found nowhere else in the *Morte Darthur*.

"So within a while they saw a tower as white as any snow, well matchecold all about and double dyked; and over the tower gate there hung a fifty shields of divers colors, and under that tower there was a fair meadow."[1] The Black Knight, the Red Knight, the Green Knight, above all the resplendent Blue Knight, Sir Persant of Ind, are of the old brilliance: and the tournament in which Gareth, thanks to the magic ring, changes his

[1] *Morte Darthur*, vii., 10, p. 194.

color from green to blue or yellow is almost as rainbow bright as any in romance. The more the story is read, the more one feels how it breathes the aroma of the first mediæval period.

Yet if the source be an independent work,—perhaps an episodic romance complete in itself and not fused till Malory's time with the general Arthuriad,—Malory's work appears the more remarkable. For the story as placed is more than an admirable tale; it is an essential link in the whole development. For one thing, certain figures of primary importance, as Tristram and Lamorak, are introduced into the narrative, some of them for the first time; and while they take no part in this special action, their presence aids the growing familiarity which needs to be acquired with the larger world of the main plot. More significant, however, is the careful preparation for future developments in the relations between Lancelot and Gawain.

Toward the end of the book, when Queen Margawse has come to court, all the main groups of the Table Round are marshalled. It has already been said that the relations among these groups plainly reflect the relations among arrogant feudal nobles, which gave endless trouble to more than one English king. United by loyalty to Arthur, by a real sense of fellowship, no less than by the necessity of defending the kingdom against its foes, the groups within the Table Round were yet always suspicious and potentially hostile to one another. These main groups are three: first, the sons of Lot and Margawse, nearest of kin to the king, —Gawain, Gaheris, Gareth, Agravaine,—to whom must be added the ill-omened Mordred. Second, the gens of Pellinore, which includes Lamorak,—a mighty knight and crude, lover of Margawse, always in early days

matched with Tristram and Lancelot,—the saintly Percivale, the colorless Aglovale, and the half-brother Tor. Third, the gens of Lancelot, which includes Ector, Bors and Lionel, Blamore de Ganis and Bleoberis: French knights these, acceptable to all the Table Round, yet always with a little foreign touch about them.

Throughout the *Morte*, the House of Lot and the House of Pellinore are as already noted in deadly feud, and a dark undercurrent flows from this feud through the story. On the other hand, Lancelot and his friends, endowed with French suavity and charm, keep on the best apparent terms with every one. Gawain might easily feel bitter, seeing a stranger knight preferred before him by his honored uncle and by all the court; but it must be said for Gawain that like all true Companions of the Table Round, he possesses a real great-mindedness. Lancelot's courtesy and modesty moreover rob the situation of its sting. Yet that situation must be kept in mind throughout the unfolding of future events. And the key to it is in the relations of Lancelot and Gareth.

Gareth is very proud of his family; it is with satisfaction that the young Beaumains announces himself at the proper moment as Gareth of Orkney, brother to Gawain, Gaheris and Agravaine; there is an emotional meeting between Gawain and himself. But Lancelot, not Gawain, is his adored hero,—Lancelot, who first spoke him fair, who defended him against Kay's sharp tongue, who followed when the young unknown had ridden forth derided, and dubbed him knight, having received his confidence. Gareth had good reason for loving Lancelot. And in time he turns against his brother:

Lord! the great cheer that Sir Lancelot made of Sir Gareth and he of him, for there was never no knight that Sir Gareth loved so well as he did Sir Lancelot; and ever for the most part he would be in Sir Lancelot's company; for after Sir Gareth had espied Sir Gawain's conditions, he withdrew himself from his brother, Sir Gawain's, fellowship, for he was vengeable, and where he hated he would be avenged with murder, and that hated Sir Gareth.[1]

This sharp severance of the natural affinities of kinship is to be remembered; it is the stuff out of which tragedy is brewed. And Malory's development of his theme, which seems so casual and so episodic, is inexorably motived and steadily sustained.

Meanwhile, this is the last story Malory presents which is wholly happy,—uninvaded by moral scruples or by the sad recognition of conflicting forces within chivalry itself. Let the picture given in the Pageant of Gareth be enjoyed while it may, for it will not long remain unshadowed. The enemies of Arthur are subdued. The rôles of the characters are assigned. King, Church and Lady shine like guiding stars in the heaven of knighthood. The ideal so desperately needed in the earlier books, is now a potent reality. It has the world before it. The tournament held by Liones toward the close of this seventh book, gives occasion for a sort of roll-call of the knights, marshalled in bright array like the saints triumphant. Year by year the Fellowship gathers at the Festival of the Spirit to renew its vows before riding forth on quest. These vows meet sharp tests in the course of the adventures encountered. Will the knights stand the tests? Will the Table Round achieve its purpose? How long will the idealism of youth endure?

[1] *Morte Darthur*, vii., 34, p. 236.

CHAPTER III

THE PAGEANT OF ROMANTIC LOVE

I

THE books from VIII. to XI. are drawn from the prose *Tristram;* and Book VIII. starts abruptly with a new beginning: "It was a king that hight Meliodas, and he was lord and king of the country of Lionesse . . . and at that time King Arthur reigned."[1] There is no *finesse* to Malory's transitions; whatever unity may obtain in the design as a whole, the joints are always as evident as in rough carpenters' work. The insertion of this brand-new story from a fresh source at this point seems at first sight awkward; yet a deliberate reason existed for it.

Malory's method, once his stage is set, is to focus attention on one element in chivalry after another. Loyalty to the overlord needs no exposition just now; Arthur is the center of a devoted knighthood, and the relation to him is basic throughout the entire story. Two chief forces remain,—forces represented, apart from chivalric romance, in those characteristic mediæval works, the *Romaunt of the Rose* and the *Legenda Aurea:* mystic asceticism, and woman-worship. Malory meant to show both, first in their succession, then in their conflict, and *L'amour Courtois* had the right of way.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, viii., 1, p. 238.

To expound it, the Tristram story was the natural medium; for it was the love story *par excellence.* Lancelot was indeed the greatest of lovers,—but he was very much more; Tristram is lover first, last, and always, and wherever he and Iseult sojourn the air is tremulous with lovers' vows.

Hear the Rules of Loyal Love, as stated by an old knight to a young in the *Livre des Cent Ballades*, about midway between Chrétien and Malory[1]:

> To be joyous day and night. To be envious of no one; to love God, to destroy no good man's reputation, to support no bad cause, to love his lady, to praise *ses faits, ses riz, ses jeux*, and to be curious to find things to please her. To be *gent, doulz et plaisant;* not to be silent, but to speak seasonably and graciously, to clothe himself neatly, not to slander anyone, to be generous in giving, to be secret, not to be proud, to sing, dance, joust and fight well. If one's own country is at peace, to get the lady's consent to go abroad to war; to discipline one's followers. To spare no pain, peril, or labor to win love.

By following these laws, the old knight had won the love of the fairest of ladies and life had been Paradise to him. The ideal he obeyed held its own all through the Middle Ages; and no one can wonder, for it was the source of noble disciplines competent "to raise appetite into sentiment, and sentiment into purity."[2] Mediæval love was an art as well as a passion, possessing its own code and its own standards, and it is impossible to understand the *Morte Darthur* unless one realizes how defiantly the passion itself, indifferent

[1] *Origins and Sources of the Court of Love*, p. 196. Neilson, Boston, 1899. See also *Romania*, xii., p. 532.

[2] J. W. Cornish, *Chivalry*, p. 13.

to domesticity, religion or law, is still considered a hallowing and exalting force.

For it was a passion regulated by no moral scruples of a modern type; complex in origin it was also complex in character, and its very disciplines proceeded in part from an evil root.

> The central point of the ideal in *L'amour Courtois* [says Dr. Neilson], was more often than not an adulterous passion. . . . But to social anarchy the human spirit is always in the long run averse . . . and there grew up around the new immorality a series of checks and restraints perhaps less burdensome but no less elaborate than those which surrounded the old ecclesiastical code.[1]

As a result, the religious principles represented by the Church were steadily in revolt against the ideal and it is hardly too much to say that Catholicism and *L'amour Courtois* became two rival institutions, each claiming the allegiance of gentle hearts.

The antagonism grew more conscious as time went on. It was impossible for the later Middle Ages to regard these sex relations with the unquestioning enthusiasm of the age of Marie de France. Yet taste clung tenaciously to what conscience challenged, and in these ensuing books, Malory allows the old sympathies to rule unrebuked. No tedious criticism shall intrude: "Take thy way unto the court of King Arthur," cries La Beale Isoud with an almost terrible exultation, —sending her message, by a refinement of cruelty, through her hopeless lover Palomides,—"And there recommend me unto Queen Guenevere, and tell her that I send her word that there be within this land but four lovers, that is, Sir Lancelot du Lake and Queen

[1] Neilson, *Court of Love*, p. 176.

Guenevere, and Sir Tristram de Liones and Queen Isoud."[1] The message is in the tone of that last word, to be spoken near the end of the story, concerning the woeful Guenevere. Justice is meted out to her in strict measure, but all the same, superb inconsistency proclaims at the last, that "while she lived she was a good lover, and therefore she had a good end."

All mediæval sentiment is implied in such return on the sterner morals of the story. And for us too, as we read, the Lord of the Gentle heart is the Master, and other interests and enthusiasms fade for the moment in his presence. Tristram may be in every particular all that a knight should be,—may slay the Morholt and redeem the land, may joust right valiantly, may seek by incessant exploits to win his place at the Round Table. We watch him indifferently,—rousing to interest only when, insolent and ardent in his hunter's green, he seizes his harp and enters the presence of Iseult.

II

The first feeling however in any reader of Malory who knows the older Tristram story, is disappointment.

To begin with, Malory almost drowns the fine old tale in irrelevant matter. He throws nearly all he cares to tell about the lovers into the eighth book, and proceeds in the ninth and interminable tenth to wander off into Arthur-land at large,—forever obliging us, when we want to hear about Iseult, to learn how Tristram jousted with Breuse Sans Pitié or sought after Lancelot. Morever, he omits the best part of the story altogether, and slurs what he chooses to tell. In his mutilated and hybrid version, the lovers go about their

[1] *Morte Darthur*, viii., 31, p. 283.

pursuits a little wearily. When they and the Middle Ages were young, they were creatures of the out-of-doors, seen habitually in woodland ways, or on the open sea. In their old age they have abjured these tastes; they play their parts decorously at court, and feel most at home as Lancelot's guests in the splendors of Joyous Garde. The reader must turn to Béroul if he would roam through the forest of Morrois with them till they grow haggard with want, he must turn to Gottfried if he would share their life in the good green wood and their joy in the enchanting love-grotto around which burgeons a mediæval spring at its daintiest. Malory informs us casually at this point in their career that they withdrew to a "fair manor," where doubtless they could profit by all the advantages of civilization. He has kept the harshness but not the charm of the old wilding flavor; he has given a mere travesty of the lovely tale. Conventionality has settled over the whole story like a blight. Tristram and Iseult love "wonderly much," swoon when separated, grow mad when suspecting one another. We would gladly give all their throes for one such passage as that in which the earlier poets describe the drinking of the fatal potion or the final farewell.

The exquisite version of Gottfried von Strassburg most directly invites comparison with Malory. This poem is perhaps the finest inspired by a secular theme in mediæval literature, as Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* is the finest inspired by religion. It has fresh feeling and direct movement. It presents a delightful and dramatic story, with extraordinary mastery of the psychology of passion, and with touches of pungent sarcasm which keep the sweetness from cloying. The crux of the Tristram tale, the drinking of the potion on

the sea, may well be contrasted as it is presented by Gottfried and by Malory. Tristram and Iseult are on their way to Cornwall, where Iseult is to become the bride of King Mark. There has to this point been no passion between them, only loyalty and friendship, and the devoted service of a lady by a youthful knight. In the summer heats, they drink by maladventure the cooling wine which is a love-potion, prepared by Iseult's mother to ensure love between the bride and her husband Mark.

Here is Malory's story,—tame enough, and in spite of its brevity weakened by repetitions:

And then anon Sir Tristram took the sea, and La Beale Isoud; and when they were in their cabin, it happed so that they were thirsty, and they saw a little flacket of gold stand by them, and it seemed by the color and the taste that it was noble wine. Then Sir Tristram took the flacket in his hand and said, Madam Isoud, here is the best drink that ever ye drank, that Dame Brangwaine your maiden and Governail my servant have kept for themselves. Then they laughed and made good cheer, and either drank to other freely, and they thought never drink that ever they drank to other was so sweet nor so good. But by that their drink was in their bodies, they loved either other so well that never their love departed for weal neither for woe. And thus it happed the love first betwixt Sir Tristram and La Beale Isoud, the which love never departed the days of their life.[1]

It is less easy to quote from Gottfried; for he draws out his details with a lingering sweetness, and penetrates each successive emotion. Shakespeare, Meredith, have no lovelier love-scenes. The lovers drink:

[1] *Morte Darthur*, viii., 24, p. 272.

And even as it was done, Brangwaine entered, and saw well what had chanced. For very terror she became white as death. Cold at heart, she took that vessel of ill chance and flung it into the wild and stormy sea. "Woe is me, she said, within herself, that ever I was born into this world! Miserable that I am, I have lost mine honor and failed in my trust. . . . Alas, Tristram and Iseult, for this drink shall be your death!"

Now when the man and the maid had drunk of the potion, Love, who never resteth but besetteth all hearts crept softly into the hearts of the twain, and ere they were ware of it had she planted her banner of conquest therein. . . . But one heart had they, her grief was his sadness, his sadness her grief. . . . She felt shame of her love, and the like did he. She doubted of his love and he of hers. For though both their hearts were blindly bent to one will, yet was the chance and the beginning heavy to them, and both alike would hide their desire. When Tristan felt the pangs of love, then he bethought him straightway of his faith and honor, and would fain have set himself free. . . . Yet ever the more he looked into his heart, the more he found that therein was nothing but love,—and Iseult. Even so was it with the maiden. . . . Shyly she looked on him and he on her, till heart and eyes had done their work. . . . So the ship sailed gayly onwards. . . . Each knew the mind of the other, yet was their speech of other things.[1]

Never was the moment of confession more artfully prepared: never more sweetly rendered than in the sequel. Compared with such treatment as this, Malory's tone is that of a mere synopsis.

In Malory, the development of the passion is almost entirely missed; from this first moment to the last farewell in Gottfried, it is treated with extreme subtlety.

[1] *Tristan and Iseult*, tr. from Gottfried von Strassburg, by Jessie L. Weston, vol. ii., pp. 9–13.

The poetic and idyllic beauty of Gottfried finds no parallel in Malory; and how can one forgive the Englishman or his source his omission of the unforgotten story of Tristram's death—the tale of the rival queens, the white sail and the black, the thrice repeated cry for his *amie*, the lie of the wife, the piteous ending? Malory's Tristram is tamely and incidentally slain as he is harping before his lady,—slain in a parenthesis, after attention has long been diverted to other things!

It is Mark who kills him, and the degeneration of the story is sharply illustrated by the change in the treatment of the Cornish king. In the old version, he is entirely and pathetically noble: by Malory's time, he has become the meanest of comedy villains. He is the hated butt of Arthur's knights, so poor a sneak and coward that the lovers hardly need an apology. The story is impoverished and embittered by the change; the sweet spring airs that blew through it are replaced by sultry gusts in which life can not thrive. Sympathy goes with the lovers to be sure and no moral reprobation is expressed. But Tennyson had full justification in Malory, from whom he drew, for the most disagreeable of the *Idylls of the King*.

III

The right way to approach Malory's Tristram books, however, is not to compare them with the indubitably finer early versions, but to take them in relation with the whole of the *Morte Darthur;* and when they are so viewed the treatment of them is largely justified.

Malory needed to remove his scene a little from the main action, in order to gain the effect he desired. He wished, for the time being, to command an undivided

sympathy for love and lovers. This could hardly be done at the court of Arthur, but it was a simple matter at the court of Mark. Cornwall is a region of wild living and evil customs; "appetite" needs to be "raised into sentiment" there, for in that dishonored and degenerate land coarse manners and coarser morals prevail, and the relations between lovers, however they may share the general disorder, are often the best thing it has to show. In Arthur's court on the other hand, one has a right to demand that "sentiment" be "raised into purity," and in this latter endeavor, *L'amour Courtois* runs considerable risk of coming to grief.

Perhaps the point is better demonstrated by some of the minor characters than by the principals. Not all the love depicted is of the chivalric or romantic type, however; a cold-blooded Feminist might find material in them for a thesis on the Position of Woman as it developed from primitive to modern times. Without subjecting innocent romance to so pedantic a process, one may well feel interested in the hints afforded of a changing order.

There are clear traces, to begin with, of a stratum in sex-relations when mere primeval instinct prevailed. Women are frequently viewed as plain booty. Iseult is Mark's possession rather than his wife, and his attitude toward her is frankly that of the owner. Ladies are bandied about from one to another. In an unpleasant episode about the wife of Sir Segwarides, which precedes the main action, the lady is loved by Mark and Tristram and carried off by Bleoberis. Etiquette develops queerly; Tristram, reproached by a court lady because he makes no effort to follow the wife of Sir Segwarides, explains the proprieties of the situation: It

is not my part to have ado in such matters, while her lord and husband is present here,"[1] says he,"—owner rather than lover having evidently the right of way. Segwarides, however, having vainly tried to rescue her, Tristram intervenes; and Sir Bleoberis and he, taking a fancy to each other, allow the lady to choose to which she will belong. Somewhat disgusted, she shows, to their surprise, enough spirit and common sense to demand that they restore her to her husband! He in his turn is the most placable of consorts: "I will never hate a noble knight," quoth he later, "for a light lady."[2]

Iseult herself is carried off in much the same wild way: a similar misadventure is later to befall Guenevere at the hand of Meliagraunce, who rides through these books sighing for her. Sometimes a crude phase of chivalric custom seems mixed with more barbaric ideas. Tristram on his way back to Mark's court with the young Iseult, soon after the drinking of the potion, is challenged by a certain knight with the abrupt dilemma: "For an thy lady be fairer than mine, with thy sword smite off my lady's head; and if my lady be fairer than thine, with my sword I must strike off her head. And is I may win thee yet shall thy lady be mine, and thou shalt lose thy head. Sir, said Tristram, this is a foul custom and horrible." Forced to conform to it, however, he "showed La Beale Isoud, and turned her thrice about with nis naked sword in his hand. And when Sir Breunor saw that, he did in the same wise turn his lady."[3] Showman's tricks indeed, not much connected with *L'amour Courtois*, or with courtesy or love of any kind!

Instances of this sort make plain how much *L'amour Courtois* had to do for the Middle Ages. They reveal

[1] *Morte Darthur*, viii., 15, p. 260.
[2] *Ibid.*, viii., 38, p. 298.
[3] *Ibid.*, viii., 25, p. 274.

underlying the chivalric code, an inconceivably brutal idea of sex-relations, surviving from that primitive epoch in which so many of the Arthurian motifs and stories first took shape. Compared with this idea, the non-moralities of *L'amour Courtois* appear insignificant, while the self-control for which it calls, the respect and the tenderness toward women, shine almost as fair to our eyes as to the twelfth century.

That means very fair indeed, and absorbingly interesting. Courteous Love, with its peculiar limitations, marks the climax of admirable things in Malory until the Grail quest has exalted life to a level undreamed by the knights riding boisterously through these pages. But Courteous Love itself has its varieties. Every one in these books is excited about Love, every one illustrates it. The habitual conversation would have sounded strange indeed in the ears of Charlemagne's peers! For the knights, mainly preoccupied till now with matters militant, are forever discussing the beauty of women. The endless tournaments which clog the action hinge on the presence of feminine spectators; the men constantly boast that their own ladies are the most fair. Groaning lovers are round every corner, seated by every well: Epinogris, Lamorak, Alisaunder le Orphelin, La Cote Mal Taillé, Palomides,—even Meliagraunce, boldly avowing, not yet with sinister hint, his passion for Guenevere. The unseen Lancelot is honored as the greatest of lovers, the example to them all. These knights are chiefly defined by their attitude in love; and they are vividly individualized.

The idyll is the story of Alisaunder le Orphelin, and Alice La Beale Pilgrim,—an exquisite bit of writing and a perfect example of courtly love as conceived by mediæval fancy at its best. Alisaunder plays his part in

the main action, inasmuch as he is nephew and victim to Mark, and bedazzled for a time by the wiles of Morgan le Fay. But his charming story needs no excuse for being. Love comes to him and his lady, sudden as compelling:

And when La Beale Alice saw him joust so well, she thought him a passing goodly knight on horseback. And then she leapt out of her pavilion, and took Sir Alisaunder by the bridle, and thus she said: Fair knight, I require thee of thy knighthood show me thy visage. I dare well, said Alisaunder, show my visage. And then he put off his helm; and she saw his visage, she said: O sweet Jesu, thee I must love, and never other. Then show me your visage, said he. Then she unwimpled her visage. And when he saw her he said: Here have I found my love and my lady. Truly, fair lady, said he, I promise you to be your knight, and none other that beareth the life. Now, gentle knight, said she, tell me your name. My name is, said he, Alisaunder le Orphelin. Now, damosel, tell me your name, said he. My name is, said she, Alice La Beale Pilgrim. And when we be more at our heart's ease, both ye and I shall tell other of what blood we be come.[1]

So he goes back to his fight with doubled zest. It is all perfect, from the frank and instantaneous avowal by the lady, to the little touch at the end about the "blood." Lineage may not be ignored for long, whatever love may dictate!

Unalloyed sentiment, in sound art, all but invariably calls for comic relief. Again and again, Malory slyly laughs at his lovers. Lamorak, a figure vigorously etched, in contrast to the youthful and ingenuous Alisaunder, is an instance in point. Heavy, big-boned,

[1] *Morte Darthur*, Vol. ii., x., 38, 39, pp. 35–36.

valiant and vulgar, he presents a coarse travesty of the chivalric ideal. Son to Pellinore, brother to Percivale the Grail-seeker, he is honored for his prowess by all the fellowship; the book of Sir Gareth has already shown him ranked with Tristram and Lancelot in common estimation. But not content with tempestuous fighting, he must e'en conform to the pattern by tempestuous loving too; and the lady of his vows is that extremely disagreeable person, Queen Margawse. He loves vehemently and coarsely as his nature is, but according to the rules. Riding with Meliagraunce, lover of Guenevere, he engages in debate as to the rival charms of the ladies, sighs after approved fashion, comports himself perfectly. Mark, riding on adventure,—for Mark enjoys knight-errantry with the best,—comes across him by the brink of a fountain, making great languor and dole, and the dolefullest complaint of love that ever man heard—and this is the complaint: "O fair queen of Orkney, King Lot's wife, and mother of Sir Gawaine and to Sir Gaheris, and mother to many another, for thy love I am in great pains."[1]

It is hardly conceivable that the chronicler reported this elderly *amour* without a chuckle. The humor broadens as the scene goes on, and Lamorak, who is an honorable man in his way and a Companion of the Table Round, tells home truths to the disguised Mark concerning his behavior to Sir Tristram the worshipfullest knight now living. But Lamorak is sinister as well as amusing. The grotesque and the tragic jostle one another in his story; the reader can not join in the general lamentation when the rumor is bruited abroad of his death at the hands of the sons of Margawse; but in the relentless though submerged movement of the

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 8, p. 382.

main plot, which proceeds through all these seeming wanderings, that rumor, too well based on fact, must be remembered.

One personage, however, stands for jollity unshadowed. This is Sir Dinadan,—as pleasant a sketch as Malory ever drew. Sir Dinadan is no lover at all, but sets off the theme of the books by perverse and merry contradictions. He is a knight of mediocre powers, but a capital goodfellow,—loyal comrade, with a knack at hero-worship and a sharp tongue in his head. He adds spice to the sighs of his lovelorn friends, poking fun at them and at all true lovers, only to be worsted in argument and joust. Bonhomie and merriment enter the tale whenever Dinadan appears. Tristram, meeting him as he rides on hunting, allows his lover's state to be known, and Dinadan remarks:

> Such a foolish knight as ye are, I saw but late this day lying by a well, and . . . there he lay like a fool grinning, and would not speak . . . and well I wot he was a lover. Ah fair sir, said Sir Tristram, are ye not a lover? Marry, fie on that craft! said Sir Dinadan. That is evil said, said Sir Tristram, for a knight may never be of prowess but if he be a lover. . . . And thus as they hoved still, they saw a knight come riding against them. . . . Anon, as Sir Dinadan beheld him he said: That is the same doted knight that I saw lie by the well, neither sleeping nor waking. Well, said Sir Tristram, I know that knight well with the covered shield of azure, he is the king's son of Northumberland, his name is Epinegris; and he is as great a lover as I know, and he loveth the king's daughter of Wales, a full fair lady. And now I suppose, said Sir Tristram, an ye require him he will joust with you, and then shall ye prove whether a lover be a better knight, or ye that will not love no lady.[1]

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 55, p. 62.

Dinadan is never keen on jousting,—but he can hardly refuse this challenge, so he tilts with Epinegris and gets a fall, whereupon Tristram taunts him gleefully: "How now, meseemeth the lover hath well sped."[1] That love is the condition of valor is sound mediæval doctrine, which no reader is allowed to deny.

IV

Among these studies of lovers, Iseult and Tristram can certainly not be left out: and even if they are less winning than they once were, their portraits as drawn in Malory well deserve attention.

It must never be forgotten that the Tristram story, unlike the Lancelot story, originally antedated the twelfth-century development of Courtly Love, and that the relation between the lovers was at first a simple natural passion, tragic because fated, and excused on that score. It is in Gottfried that sophisticated twelfth-century sentiment took entire possession of the tale, and even through his version some of the original traits shine clear. In Malory's time, certain of these traits still linger. Tristram's Celtic magic has not wholly deserted him. All through mediæval literature, he is *par excellence* the temperamental knight, full of emotional impulses and artistic accomplishments. He is a sylvan personage, at home in the woods, as expert in hunting as he is in harping. Although his figure in Malory is coarsened and conventionalized, these suggestions are retained. It seems natural to find Tristram in his madness sousing Dagonet in a well, and coming naked through the wood at the lure of a harp played by a kindly lady. He always loved dogs: several, named with playful affection,—Hudent, Petit-Cru,—are associated with him in the poems. He loves

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 55; p. 63.

them still, and still he haunts the woods dressed in huntsman's green. He has not forgotten his mastery of the noble art of venerie, and when borne in mortal languor across the seas to Ireland, he can still harp a merry lay from his pillows so that all men flock to the boat to hear.

His very faults impart savor and vitality to his figure. These faults are many; for in Malory, Tristram, splendid and famous knight though he be, is purposely and systematically degraded, in order that the high light may fall steadily on Lancelot. His inferiority to the protagonist comes out even in his *amours*, for he is by no means the lover of Iseult only. He can hardly be blamed for the love bestowed on him by the daughter of the king of France, and one could ill spare her gift, the little dog, though he is a less alluring creature than Petit-Cru, of the older tale, whose changeable hues and little bell came straight from fairyland. But it is shocking to find the origin of Mark's enmity to Tristram in their rivalry for the favors of the disreputable though entertaining wife of Sir Segwarides; and Lancelot was right in feeling that it was ill done to wed Iseult of the White Hands, nor does Tristram's neglect of his bride atone for the deed. Tristram is fiercer also than Arthur's knights. No gentle Companion of the Table Round would have decapitated the lady of Sir Breunor, were it ten times the custom of the castle. Rhetorical bragging is a favorite trait of old Germanic and Celtic heroes, and Tristram could have held his own against any of them at the game; but at Arthur's court, where men are fair-languaged and modesty of speech is admired, he would have been listened to in pained surprise. Tristram is a very primitive person, after all the centuries of his experience.

And perhaps he keeps his original character a little

more than Iseult does. In the early versions she is a delightful girl,—quick-witted, passionate, vindictive, with something vehement and pungent about her; always impetuous, occasionally cruel,—as when she orders the death of her faithful woman Brangwaine with a hateful sort of policy that recalls fairy-tale morals. But she is true as steel to her lover, warm-hearted, clever and brave: a real Irish princess. By the time Malory gets hold of her, she has wandered through so many centuries that her vitality has departed. She no longer plays her enemies of the court with clever ruse against ruse. She can smile on other suitors, as on Kehydius,—though to do her justice the letter which drove Tristram mad with jealousy was written in mere compassion. She who had asked no better than to wander through the forest in tatters with her lover, now thrives on compliments and court-life, and likes best of anything to attend, richly beseen, innumerable and endless tournaments. Probably she is attending them to this day.

Yet in this story, so mutilated and so dry, one unspoiled thing remains; the picture of the early relations of the lovers before the fatal drink. For nowhere can be found a prettier example of the chivalric attitude toward women than in the earlier phases of their intercourse. The modern reader is likely to read the story amiss, supposing Tristram and Iseult to be "in love" from the occasion of Tristram's first visit to Ireland, when the queen-mother heals him of the poisoned wound inflicted by Sir Marhaus and he becomes the tutor of the little princess. On this theory, Tristram is to be pitied when he is later sent back to Ireland to win Iseult for his uncle's bride. But the theory is wrong.

The child-princess, taught by the youth in harping and, as is elsewhere told, in languages, "began to have

a great fantasy unto him."[1] She begged him to enter a tournament to defend her against the unwelcome ardors of Palomides the Paynim knight, and Tristram, jealous of the Saracen's valor, is all too glad to comply. He agrees on condition that she shall be his lady, and she accepts joyously and arms him, giving him her device. Nothing could be more delicately true to the ideas of chivalry than the whole episode. But love-making in the modern sense has naught to do with it. The disinterestedness of the relation is evident when the queen discovers Tristram's identity as the slayer of her brother and he is forced to quit Ireland. Honorably and friendly he speaks to the king:

> I promise you as I am true knight, that in all places I shall be my lady, your daughter's, servant and knight in right and in wrong, and I shall never fail her to do as much as a knight may do. Also I beseech your good grace that I may take my leave at my lady, your daughter, and at all the barons and knights.[2]

Permission is accorded, and Tristram and Iseult say good-by; there is no shadow of passion in that parting, not though the little Iseult weeps heartily. Tristram renews his promise to be her faithful knight; and she promises in return that she will not be married without his consent for seven years, and that he shall select her husband! "And to whom that ye will I shall be married to him will I have, and he will have me if ye will consent."[3] So they exchange rings and separate in all innocence. Nor does Tristram suffer the slightest qualm when Mark later bids him return to seek Iseult for the royal bride; the danger of the adventure, rather than any violence

[1] *Morte Darthur*, viii., 9, p. 250.
[2] *Ibid.*, viii., 12, p. 255.
[3] *Ibid.*, viii., 12, p. 256.

to his feelings, gives the point to his loyal devotion in obeying the king. His is pure chivalric service seeking no reward.

V Story of Palomides

Mediæval tenderness comes out in odd and unexpected ways. It is not in Tristram that *L'amour Courtois* finds most perfect expression, it is in an unchristened man,—Palomides, Paynim lover of Iseult. He is a person invented by the prose romances, foil to Tristram much as Tristram is foil to Lancelot. His quaint and piteous figure is worth a dozen of Malory's Tristrams; it deserves a section to itself.

Palomides is a child of nature; he has no self-control. When he has the bad luck to lose his horse, he can sit roaring and crying like a man out of his mind. He shocks the polished knights of Arthur: they hold toward this *enfant terrible* an attitude of mixed affection and disapproval. They condone his behavior on the score that he is a Paynim, and long for his christening, convinced that only the holy laver can subdue the proud, hot blood of heathenesse into gentleness, courtesy and self-restraint. And Palomides, before the story opens, has told Iseult that he has a mind to be christened for her sake, but he has made a vow to fight seven good battles for Jesu's sake before he seeks the holy rite, and meantime he behaves half the time like the heathen man he is.

Palomides is the Lover Hopeless, and therefore the pure ennobling power of love is shown through him in its perfection. Before ever Tristram came to Ireland, he has served Iseult, and he remains her servant to the end. At her rebuke he can go mad, at her smile he can

remove mountains. Tristram overthrows him when first they meet, and bids him forego his lady's presence for a year. He obeys, but when the year is over he appears in Cornwall,—Iseult having married Mark in the interim,—and restores her lost handmaid Brangwaine to the queen, demanding a boon in return. This boon is Iseult herself; and when she escapes, he sits him down like a man out of his wits before the castle where she has taken refuge. Tristram, arriving, fights him, till Iseult stops the conflict. She is loath that Palomides should die a Saracen, and, woman-like, inflicts punishment sharper than death on him by sending him to Guenevere with the insolent word of her love for Tristram. Palomides departs with great heaviness, and is heard of no more for a long time.

He reappears in Book IX., following that strange companion, the Questing Beast; does marvelous deeds of arms, yet in spite of them is ever worsted and shamed. He is consumed by wistful admiration of that fair fellowship to which he is an alien. Of all men he loves Tristram the best, and would fain win honor of him; torn between envious jealousy and loyal devotion, he plays a half comic, half tragic, wholly human part.

> Alas, said Sir Palomides [to Tristram unrecognized] I may never win worship where Sir Tristram is. . . . What would ye do, said Sir Tristram, an ye had Sir Tristram? I would fight with him, said Sir Palomides, and ease my heart upon him; and yet, to say thee sooth, Sir Tristram is the gentlest knight in this world living.[1]

So begins a curious friendship; for the kindly knights adopt him of their company, and by and by he is thrown into prison with Tristram and Dinadan. There

[1] *Morte Darthur*, ix., 31, p. 349.

he behaves very whimsically. Tristram was like to have died of great sickness, "and every day Sir Palomides would reprove Sir Tristram of old hate betwixt them. . . . But when Sir Palomides saw the falling of sickness of Sir Tristram, then was he heavy for him and comforted him in all the best wise he could."[1] The knights separate when released, and presently Tristram is saving the life of Palomides, and challenges him to mortal combat. But Palomides, with a gleam of real chivalric perception, refuses to fight with one so weary and foredone.

Often however he shows no such self-restraint. His hot blood is always betraying him; he takes unfair advantage of his adversary, and incurs rebuke from knights better born and bred. Thus he forces unequal combat on the wounded Lamorak. "Sir," says Lamorak, . . . "that is me loth to do, for Thou hast done me wrong and no knighthood to proffer me battle considering my great travail, but an thou wilt tell me thy name I will tell thee mine." Palomides is impulsive and uncontrolled, but he is always as swift to repent as he is swift to err. When he heard Lamorak's name, "he kneeled down and asked mercy, for outrageously have I done to you this day; . . . shamefully and unknightly I have required you to do battle."[2] Meanness is no sin of Lamorak's, he embraces and comforts him and welcomes him to his company.

The great tournament of Surluse is the crisis of his career. Here, under his lady's eyes, he bears him valiantly and wins great honor; and Tristram, indolently condescending and appreciating his exploits, brings him to Joyous Garde where Iseult and he are the guests of Lancelot. This is apparently the first time that Palo-

[1] *Morte Darthur*, ix., 36, p. 358. [2] *Ibid.*, x., 19, p. 400.

mides has laid eyes on his lady in many a year, and he would hang back and would not have gone into the castle, but Sir Tristram took him by the finger and led him in. And when he saw La Beale Isoud he was ravished so that he might hardly speak, so they went into meat but Palomides might not eat.

There is good-fellowship and fair for a time, reward for years of stumbling but honest effort. But Palomides is not yet by any means able to hold the favor of his friends steadily. Next day, in the very heyday of success in the tournament, intent on the excitement of jousting with Lancelot, he does a disgraceful thing: he smites the neck of Lancelot's horse, so that Lancelot falls to the ground!

> Then was the cry huge and great, See how Sir Palomides the Saracen hath smitten down Sir Lancelot's horse! Right then were there many knights wroth with Sir Palomides by cause he had done that deed, therefore many knights held there against that it was unknightly done in a tournament to kill an horse willfully but that it had been done in plain battle, life for life.[1]

A cruel change after the chorus of praise,—and Iseult all the time looking on!

So the heart is taken out of poor Palomides. Lancelot, hot with resentment, bears down on him; and the Paynim puts up no fight at all, but cries for mercy, with a childlike plea: "Have mercy noble knight, . . . and forgive me mine unkindly deeds. . . . An ye put me from my worship now, ye put me from the greatest worship that ever I had or ever shall have in my life days."[2] Lancelot would not be Lancelot if he did not forgive, adding a generous meed of praise. So Palomides gets his coveted

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 70, p. 92. [2] *Ibid.*, x., 71, p. 93.

"worship,"—the honor and gree as for that day. And after the fighting, come feasting and fellowship and merry words: Dinadan handling Tristram roughly to sting him to greater valor; Palomides praising Lancelot: "For truly as for Sir Lancelot, of his noble knighthood, courtesy, and prowess and gentleness, I know not his peer. For this day, said Sir Palomides, I did full uncourteously unto Sir Lancelot, . . . and full knightly and courteously he did to me again." Is it any wonder that every one was anxious for the christening of a man who could speak like that? And is not the quaint comment just, "This talking was in the houses of kings"?[1]

But it is hard to outgrow outlandish ways, and the tournament in which Palomides had done so well ends in disgrace. He smites down Arthur himself through sheer stupidity, and changes sides, deserting Tristram in the middle of the fight. Wherefore Iseult is wroth with him out of measure and has for him cruel words and keen. So have Arthur and Lancelot, who speak to him plainly enough for the most thick-witted Paynim to understand. Palomides, heartbroken, has all that night no rest in his bed, but wails and weeps without measure. The knights, watching him asleep, see upon his countenance that he has wept full sore, and comment not without tenderness: of a Paynim what can be expected? But Palomides leaves that tournament in dejection.

He talks his sore heart out to the languishing lover Epinegris, as they ride together exchanging laments and sighs.

Well, said Epinegris, sith that ye loved la Beale Isoud, loved she you ever again by anything that ye could think

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 72, p. 95.

or wit, or else did ye rejoice her ever in any pleasure? Nay, by my knighthood, said Palomides, I never espied that ever she loved me more than all the world, nor never had I pleasure with her; but the last day she gave me the greatest rebuke that ever I had, the which shall never go from my heart. And yet I well deserved that rebuke, for I did not knightly.[1]

Epinegris, with the usual egotism of the favored, insists that Palomides' sorrow is but japes to his, for he has enjoyed his lady and lost her. Whereupon Palomides wins back the lady for his comrade, and in so doing falls into sore straits. The news is heavy to Tristram and to Lancelot, who love him right well however severely they discipline him; Lancelot comes to his aid and brings him back forgiven, a rueful and penitent man, to Joyous Garde where Iseult waits. And all the courteous company devote themselves forthwith to making him happy, receiving him into their fellowship without reserve.

So all is well as may be with Palomides, since he has regained the privilege to consort with Tristram and Iseult and to be gently accounted of them. But it is a sorrowful privilege, and ever he faded and mourned, that all men had marvel wherefore he faded so away. One day in the dawning, he sees his defaced visage in a forest stream, and full of self-pity and love-pains begins to make a rhyme of La Beale Isoud and himself. One would like to overhear him: perhaps it was as exquisite a song of love defeated and triumphant in defeat as was ever sung by Cino or Guido Guinicelli; perhaps a mediæval "One Way of Love." Tristram overhears him, and puts himself in the wrong by resenting the song. He draws from the piteous knight an avowal, noble in

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 82, p. 113.

dignity, expressive of the best and highest that romantic love could mean to the mediæval mind: "When I remembered me of La Beale Isoud," says Palomides, "I won the worship wheresomever I came for the most part, and yet had I never reward nor bounte of her the days of my life, and yet have I been her knight guerdonless."[1]

As the knight guerdonless let him be remembered; perhaps the most truly felt, the most nobly portrayed, among all Malory's lovers. He is not all to be pitied. In a later book he completes his tale of battles; he proves himself at last perfected in self-restraint and honor, in a memorable fight with Lancelot: he comes to Arthur's court, is christened, and is made Companion of the Table Round. The event marks the opening of an epoch, for at this same feast at which Palomides is christened, appears the Holy Grail. We are not told that he entered the Quest, but surely he would have been worthy to do so.

VI

One could easily linger more than time here permits among the lovers with whom these books abound. But Malory's full purpose in these long stretches of his tale can not be understood in this way. There is a great deal here beside love-making. If mediæval readers were like modern, they probably skipped along, omitting many a joust, to pick out the sentimental passages. But if any of them read critically, they would discover other interesting things.

Malory had the deliberate intention to hold before his public the whole of chivalry implicit in its every

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 86, p. 121.

part. That is why so many threads starting from Arthur's court and leading back again into the larger pattern entangle themselves with the simple design of the old Tristram story. It can not be denied that he has all but spoilt the old design in consequence, but he has gained his end. Throughout the tale of those two woeful lovers and the rest who gather round them, he has kept fresh before the mind the onward progress of his main theme.

The chief effect of the books is to show the splendor of the Table Round by contrast with that disordered outer world where its bright chivalries are known only by report. The main scene of the books passes remote from the center, now in Ireland, now in Cornwall, in drear forests or on far waters whither Arthur's adventurous knights may find their way, but which are not brought under their allegiance. A sense of amplitude is the result. The world is wide and dark, and however men may play with ladies fair there is stern work to be done. Far away, object of longing admiration, shines the distant court of Arthur,—a well-ordered light in the savagery of surrounding darkness. To attain that light is a supreme desire, but the degraded Cornish knights, with the exception of Tristram and Palomides, may not hope for it. They are a poor lawless lot, treated with systematic scorn, and King Mark is the worst of them.

As for Tristram, the longing to achieve fellowship with the Table Round is a passion second only to his love for Iseult, and sometimes apparently stronger. This is why Iseult is ignored through long reaches of the story; and while the diversion of interest is an artistic mistake, it is at least due to definite artistic purpose. Lancelot is the center of the Round Table, and Tristram,

even when most bespelled with woman's love, wishes intensely to encounter him. On this much-delayed and carefully prepared encounter, Malory throws his high light. The meeting has been predicted by Merlin; for by a symbolism in line with the central theme of these books, it occurs beside the tomb of those misfortunate lovers, Lanceor and his lady Colombe, who were done to death by Balin. Palomides too has his share in bringing it about, for his failure to keep tryst results in Lancelot's taking his place, unknown to Tristram. No fight in Malory is so carefully staged and prepared. The antagonists joust in ignorance of each other, and pause at last, evenly matched, to reveal their names:

> Truly, said he, my name is Sir Tristram de Liones. O Jesu, said Sir Lancelot, what adventure is befallen me? And therewith Sir Lancelot kneeled down and yielded him up his sword. And therewithal Sir Tristram kneeled adown and yielded him up his sword. And so either gave other the degree. And then they both forthwithal went to the stone . . . and either kissed other an hundred times. . . . And then anon . . . they rode to Camelot.[1]

In Camelot, Tristram is joyously received and made in due time Companion of the Table Round. This is the climax of his career, the satisfaction of his supreme desire. After this, any elaboration of his later dealings with Iseult or of the last scenes would be an anticlimax from the point of view of the *Morte Darthur;* for the accredited story with all its beauty is irrelevant to the main Arthurian theme.

In the pretty scene just quoted, Tristram and Lancelot are for once equal. But through these books as a

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 5, p. 378.

whole, the superior glory of Lancelot is scrupulously enhanced. His fame echoes to the farthest bounds of the British isles. More talked of than seen, he is felt to be the type of chivalry in its wholeness; when he does appear, he speaks with such spirit, acts with such magnanimity and charm, that a little warmth begins at last to dawn in the reader's feeling for him. Meanwhile, the loftiness of mind and the courtesy of all Arthur's knights become more and more impressive; for through the leisurely ways of these long books, that goodly company gets to be intimately known. So we grow at home in the land of Logres; and while the confused and episodic nature of the treatment does retard the action, Malory allows no obsession by his special interest to obscure the supreme importance of fealty to sovereign and to Church. No man could be loyal to Mark, but far in Camelot rules a king whom all true knights serve gladly; Arthur, though rarely present is never forgotten. As for the Church, though it be neither inspirer of sanctity nor censor of morals, it receives an honest allegiance. The wanderings of the knights do not take them beyond the bounds of Christendom, but Saracen civilization, pitted against it, is constantly implied. Palomides is the chief exponent of it; poor Palomides, whose manners reflect his disadvantages, whose ill-breeding, so vociferously lamented by himself, is connected in all minds with his Paynim faith! Christianity is the only parent of gentleness and honor: no one is surer of this than the lovers, who serenely set at defiance one of its most fundamental laws!

For in spite of the purely secular enthusiasms of these books, they can not wholly ignore the conflict between Christian ideals and the strange perversions of Courtly Love. Although love improves the manners of the

knights and softens their tempers, although the attitude of the people in the story is sympathetic, the picture presented is not wholly pleasant. Brutal passion is likely to break through etiquette at any moment; the story is marred by a certain ferocity, always stirring beneath surface courtesies; something coarse and violent mingles with extreme refinement of manner. The complexity of tone is more noticeable in contrast with early versions where Arthurian affiliations are absent or faint. In these, there is no division of sympathy. Mark can be presented as noble, because no blame attaches to the lovers and they need no excuse. Times had changed by Malory's day. The inferiority of his version is due, not only to his desire to fit the old tale into a larger scheme, but also to the fact that it was his lot to reproduce the story in a world which had outgrown it. On the surface, the old enthusiasm flourished unrebuked; below the surface can be felt a growing restlessness; hints of question, and even of distaste abound. Multiplying details furnish that preparation for tragic catastrophe which is a chief function of these central books of the *Morte.*

Arthur himself is not above reproach. Malory softens his levities, gliding lightly over various episodes; but the briefly chronicled *amours* with the sorceress Annowse betray him, nor can a king be over-particular about home-affairs who extends royal protection with such zest to Tristram and Iseult, and seeks Iseult incognito that he may satisfy his curiosity about her. Nevertheless, standards are stricter in Camelot than in Cornwall and trouble is brewing.

For suspicion is at work. Morgan le Fay is mischievously busy, as usual. Early in the books, her magic horn, meant for the court of Arthur, is intercepted by

Lamorak and sent to Cornwall. Only pure women can drink of this horn without spilling, and only four ladies, —Iseult not among them,—pass the test. It does not seem to matter much,—in Cornwall; but had that horn reached Logres and Guenevere essayed in vain to drink, the affair had not been passed over so lightly. Lamorak knows this perfectly well: "An it were to do again, so would I do," he says to the angry Tristram: "For I had liefer strife and debate fell in King Mark's court rather than in Arthur's court; for the honor of both courts be not alike."[1] Hardly! A jest in Cornwall might be a tragedy at Camelot.

But how about Lamorak himself,—approved Companion of the Table Round and avowed lover of Margawse? He is prominent throughout these books; and in the main he is not only accepted but admired; yet his rôle has another aspect. The House of Gawain though subordinate in these stretches of the story, is not forgotten; and Lamorak's insolent adoration of Margawse can hardly be grateful to these proud-blooded men. There is already animosity between the houses, for Gawain and his brothers have killed Lamorak's father Pellinore because they "had a deeming" that he had killed their father Lot. The present situation exacerbates the bitter feud past endurance; and Gaheris, in a terrible scene not unworthy of Sophocles or Euripides, slays his guilty mother in her lover's presence.

The act is the more tragic because Gaheris is next to Gareth the best of the wild crew,—a gentler knight than Agravaine, or even than Gawain. It is Gawain, however, who kills Lamorak himself. No spectators witness that killing. It is never proved,—only bruited about in shocked undertones, an act which wins the

[1] *Morte Darthur*, viii., 38, p. 294.

execration of all true knights. These doings of the brothers increase the suppressed dislike with which they are viewed. Their act is justified by the older law which knows no justice but retaliation; but it is repudiated by the higher code to which men are bound by their vows. Lamorak, their comrade in arms, should have been inviolate, whatever his sins against them. At the same time, the provocation was great. The episode affords another reflection of the disturbed state of things in the Middle Ages, which must have been common indeed to transform that verbal root which in feudalism stood for fealty to the significant connotation of feud. And the tragedy, so Greek in its complications, leads into a deeper realm of conflict and moral feeling than that of romantic love.

Presently an affair about a shield brings suspicion straight home to Camelot itself. Morgan is responsible, of course. She it is who designs an insulting device, of a lady and a knight with his feet on a king, and who binds Tristram, an unconscious but suitable instrument of her malice, to display the shield under Arthur's eyes. To make sure that the insinuation bites, one of her damosels is ready to speak no uncertain words: "Sir king, wit ye well this shield was ordained for you, to warn you of your shame and dishonor and that longeth to you and your queen."[1] Anon that damosel piked her away privily, but king Arthur was sad and wroth. He was also taciturn, as usual; but in the tournament his eye was ever on that shield. He is the most discreet, the most forbearing of monarchs; but the queen complains bitterly, to Lancelot's sympathetic cousin, Sir Ector. Trouble is in the air. Not all the pleasant horse-play or true loyalty of the knights can obliterate

[1] *Morte Darthur*, ix., 43, p. 369.

it. The king may shut his eyes: but all others are aware that what is tolerated in Cornwall may not be condoned at Camelot.

Evil grows more marked before long: for letters come from Cornwall, in answer to others sent by Arthur reprimanding Mark, and they are not agreeable to read. When Arthur read his letter, he mused on many things, and studied a great while, and held his peace. As for queen Guenevere, she is wroth out of measure when she reads hers, for it speaks open scandal; and she sends it to Lancelot, who is so wroth that he quaintly and mediævally lays him down to sleep; whereupon faithful Dinadan,—lucky it was not another,—finds that letter, and reads it, and takes satisfactory reprisals on Mark. For he causes to be written and sung at the Cornish court "the worst lay that ever harper sang with harp or with any other instruments,"[1] presumably an open satire on the great Lovers. This is pleasing,—but it can not silence the sense of something gravely wrong. One is ill at ease—eager for some purifying wind to blow through this chivalric world, so fair, so foul.

These books, then, express the successive attitudes toward women and sex-relations which had been known in Europe. The accepted conventions of *L'amour Courtois* are central; below that lies the play of sense, frank and unashamed, and, still deeper, traces of that earliest epoch when women were viewed, not as tempters nor as goddesses, but as mere possessions, to be treated like loot. But, while much is behind romantic love, and lower, so suggestions are not wanting of something higher. Troubled hints of remorse pursue us; desires increase for a world of purity and law. Would we escape we must rise. Beyond these haunts

[1] *Morte Darthur*, x., 27, p. 19.

of lovers, beyond the world of Tristram and Iseult, of Lancelot and Guenevere, a ray of light with the Grail at the heart of it, leads to that far sanctuary of the ascetic where earthly passion may not enter. Palomides is christened; the Pageant of the Holy Vessel is at hand.

CHAPTER IV

THE PAGEANT OF THE HOLY GRAIL

I

"Le donne, i cavalieri, l'arme, gli amori,
Le cortesie, l'audaci imprese."

So ran Ariosto's summary of chivalric interests and joys. They are all found in the first part of Malory—women and knights, arms and love, courtesy and bold adventures. But the summary of mediæval life is not complete. Through the absorbed delight in a purely natural existence, ran the recurrent desire for something which neither arms nor love could furnish. The quickening force in romance, the spirit of adventure, led out and away, beyond the region where Tristram fought the Morholt or sang to Iseult, beyond the court where knights swore allegiance to Arthur. Toward far horizons it beckoned, past the edge of the visible world. Terms of sense no longer render it; for it turned from exploring the world without and penetrated the world within.

This spirit of adventure must always lead men to seek below the surface of things. But in the modern world, the desire to pursue life's secrets to their sanctuary is largely satisfied by the inexhaustible analysis of natural phenomena. It works powerfully in the

scientist who hangs over his microscope, and in the explorer who conquers the Pole. In the Middle Ages, a period which rarely tried to analyze nature, the instinct had to take another direction. These ages assumed the natural order as a matter of course and felt no challenge there. They regarded the visible world sometimes as a convenient abode, sometimes as an enemy to subdue; sometimes in higher moments as symbol or sacrament of ultimate reality; but never as a mystery to solve. That is, the organ of discovery worked not scientifically but mystically. It knew nothing of the ardors which chase the atom and pursue the secrets of force; it drew its elect away from the whole range of nature and natural life into lonely regions where the vision of uncreated beauty hovered veiled before the seeker.

To attain the unveiled vision, that seeker must be pure in heart; and purity of heart, to the Middle Ages, implied complete repudiation of the joys of sense. Mediæval mysticism was systematically ascetic. We moderns are just beginning to free what little mysticism we possess from the ascetic impulse, and our distaste for asceticism is a cause of our failure to understand with sympathy the more mystical phases of mediæval imagination,—a failure conspicuous in the work of some Arthurian scholars. During the centuries of reaction after the Renascence, as the desire grew to penetrate Nature's secrets instead of scorning them, mediæval mysticism ceased to make any appeal. Even the romantic revival ignored it, and people who delight in the picturesqueness of the Middle Ages as shown by Scott or William Morris, would yet turn with contempt from tales of contemplatives in their rapts or ascetics in their agonies.

But to-day, the quest for spiritual vision seems less alien than it did. Scientific methods reveal limitations, and science itself begins to whisper of a Beyond. Higher mathematics leads out suddenly into a region where human reasoning can not follow; natural science, no longer complacent, bears honest witness to forces beyond the range of its formulæ. With the philosophic stress on the value of instinct and intuition, with the general advent of a more spiritual attitude, it is possible that mediæval mystics may have justice done them at last.

Indeed, the Middle Ages can not be appraised rightly, while mysticism remains foreign to the mind, for most mediæval books are tinctured by it. They reflect a Catholic civilization, and Catholicism is mystical in its very fiber. Whole departments of literature are set apart and controlled by mystic and ascetic passion. All hagiology, for instance: the stories of holy men and women, so tenderly, so copiously preserved in the *Legenda Aurea*, so tedious to many modern readers, are chiefly interesting from one point of view,—that the saints had attained the secret places. The visible world was insistent, alluring; the Middle Ages could not feast exclusively on saint legends, nor on homiletic or theological literature. Yet not even the cycles of secular romance could escape the influence of mysticism. In Grail-romance, worldly adventure yielded to the adventures of the soul. The bright trappings of chivalry were transformed into a parable of spiritual quest and the very images most cherished in the world of sense, were used to release the spirit from sense-dominion.

In the lower form of magic or enchantment, the mystical impulse is present from the beginning of the *Morte Darthur*. Merlin and Morgan continually weave their wiles. Romance is differentiated from fairy-tale

by moderation in its use of the supernatural; magic is the exception in it, not the staple, for the point of the whole matter is that the action goes on in the real human world. But it is a world vibrating, so to speak, with constant expectation of the unexpected; the commonplace is charged with potency. When the landscape lies clearest, bedazzlement may oversweep it. Shield and sword can possess mysterious powers. White arms waving jeweled weapons may appear on the surface of still waters. In a Graveyard Perilous, one may stumble upon phantom knights, who fight till the solid earth is hollow and shadow-beset.

But from the first the mystical impulse appears in higher ways also. Celtic magic is first supplemented, then superseded, by the Catholic supernatural. Strange things are abroad in the land, awe is in the hint of them. It is Merlin himself who first predicts the Grail, and in Malory, with fine artistic instinct, his prediction follows close on his gloomy arraignment of Arthur for the begetting of Mordred. It is said that the misfortunate and magnanimous Pelleas[1] is to be one of four to achieve the Grail, though later books wot not of him. A hint of Grail-mysteries pervades the miserable tale of Balin. Faint at first, as if one heard from without a Chapel the little bell that rings at the sacring of the mass, a silver note steals into the stormy orchestration of love and war; till the orchestra dies away and we listen to far angelic choirs. Satiated with joust and fight, with love in its courtesies and coarsenesses, with adventure, even, that no longer offers surprises, the mind finds itself in the presence of a new ideal. Arms and cavaliers, loves and brave deeds, still form the staple of the story; but they are strangly altered. Iseult has vanished.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, iv., 28.

Guenevere in the background waits, restless and perplexed, the return of Lancelot, who has left her this time bent on adventure which she can not understand and is forbidden to follow. The nun-like sister of Sir Percivale, very wise, illumined with sacrificial passion, is the only woman on the scene. The Pageant of Galahad follows the Pageant of Tristram. Arthur's knights are bound on the Quest of the Holy Grail.

II

Weariness has descended on that adventurous life which seemed so inexhaustible. Toward the end of Book X. every reader is in revolt. He can not stand one more tournament or one more lover. There is nothing new under the sun.

Therefore it is a relief, when, at the outset of the eleventh book, Malory with his usual simplicity announces a change of subject and source. "Now leave we Sir Tristram de Liones, and speak we of Sir Lancelot du Lake, and of Sir Galahad, Sir Lancelot's son, how he was gotten and in what manner, as the book of French rehearseth."[1] But though in effect he does now turn to the Galahad Grail-Quest as presented in the prose *Lancelot*, there is a little interweaving. In the concluding chapters of Book XII. he reverts to the *Tristram* with no apparent reason, for the narrative of Palomides' last battle and christening might just as well have been continuous with the end of Book X. It is clumsy joining; perhaps the idea was to bring the Tristram interest and the christening of Palomides up as sharply as possible against the developed interest of the Grail. At the beginning of Book XIII., he turns away from the *Tristram* for good, and follows the prose *Lancelot* till the conclusion of the Quest.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xi., i., p. 124.

These books of the Grail do not reveal their beauty to a superficial reading. They seem at first monotonous. The colors are faint, the visible world is seen as if through a blur of pallid moonshine, the knights pass through ghostly and unconvincing adventures, explained in far-fetched allegories. And the reason for the sense of unreality conveyed is, that this portion of the Arthuriad suggests a new set of symbols. Surface imagery, only slightly changed, is still drawn from a militant world. But if experience is a battle-field it is also a pilgrimage, and as a pilgrimage the knights of the Grail-Quest encounter it.

If mediæval literature abounds in the clash of arms, it abounds no less, from the time of Bede to that of Dante, in pictures of the perpetual journey. To the outer world, the pilgrim was as familiar as the knight, and the troops who passed chanting along the roads of Kent or of Provence, bearing their staff and scrip, impressed imagination indelibly. Their quest of geographical holy places had a spiritual counterpart, for it is natural to view the soul as the Eternal Pilgrim; and pilgrimages, allegorically conceived, became a common literary type. They might occur in time or eternity. As Dante explained to Can Grande, that was all one. The Way that is trodden is always the Mystic Way, worn by countless feet, and discovered anew by each wanderer.

The birthplace of the Christianized Grail-legends was probably to be sought among those holy places, goals of pilgrimage.[1] And the more Grail-literature is studied, the more intimate appear its affiliations with

[1] See Weston, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, pp. 56–65, for a discussion of the probable influence on the legend of the Abbey of Fescamps where a "Saint Sang" relic was preserved.

the Vision and Pilgrimage literature of the Middle Ages. The fighting, even against fiends, is dreamlike and unreal; mere incident of a journey that leads "o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent," in a great solitude broken now and again by sweet companionship, and summons the elect to endless joy. The knights are pilgrims in transparent disguise; and their adventures can best be understood as phases of the Mystic Way on which contemplatives love to dwell: the Way of Purgation, the Way of Illumination, the Way of Unity.

All this is especially true of the Galahad-form of the Quest, as given in Malory; and it is not strange if many readers prefer the warm humanities of the Perceval form, as given in Wolfram von Eschenbach. Parzival is much more interesting than Galahad as a hero. Every one is appealed to by the story of the innocent uncouth boy, the careless sinner, the grim penitent seeking to expiate a fault he only half understands; every one follows eagerly the process by which he is perfected in sympathy before he can utter the healing word and become the guardian of the Grail. Compared with him, the severe and silent figure of Galahad seems almost cruelly cold,—"too far from the sphere of our sorrow" to win either love or praise.

Yet if the Galahad quest is considered, not by itself, but in relation to the whole epic movement of the Arthuriad, it is evident that no other story could be so effective. Two great results are gained by it.

The first is that it completes from the religious side the glorification of national ideals which the *Morte Darthur* ever has at heart: it sets the final seal on the patriotic character of the epic. Historic influences play a large part in shaping both types of Grail-legend. The Perceval type, especially in the *Parzival*, abounds

in memories of the Crusades and of the Templars with their hidden rites and their palace on Montserrat. Crusades and Templars belonged to all Europe; suggestions of both are frequent in Galahad-romance. But the dominant historical influence in these later romances belongs to England alone: it is the proud conviction that British Christianity derives straight from Christ Himself. As the vista lengthens from the land of Logres and the Table Round to the Upper Chamber at Jerusalem and the Foot of the Cross, the range of feeling is incalculably enlarged. The solemn scene in the *Grand San Graal* where Christ Himself consecrates the first Bishop of England with the oil to be used in the consecration of English kings, is always in the author's mind. The restoration of the Grail, symbolizing the purification of national life, was to the writer of the *Grand San Graal* the very object for which Arthur should be raised to the throne and the goodly fellowship of knights created. The writer of the *Quest*, as will presently be seen, though he can not fulfill the noble dream, does not forget it; and its effect upon the story is to enhance the national quality of the epic as could be done in no other way.

Still more important, however, is the illustration in these books of a spiritual ideal. Malory's art, always gaining its effects by contrasts, needed to place in opposition to the hot earthly passion that surges through the earlier reaches of the story, the extreme of contemplative and ascetic ardor. The Perceval tale is *rifacimento* of ancient elements; the Galahad tale is the pure creation of Catholic mysticism. Traditional elements are not absent in this version of Grail-story, but on the whole the stamp is new; and pleasure in the imaginative opulence, human tenderness and rare modernity of

Wolfram's great work, need not lessen our honor for some twelfth-century heart which rejected traditional renderings, and, with a boldness surprising in that period when originality was vice rather than virtue, presented the world with a new hero and a new quest. The result is the fine flower of mediæval religious literature, not at its most sympathetic but at its most distinctive. Nowhere out of Dante can a more exalted and delicate rendering be found of an ideal which the modern world has somewhat too lightly flouted. Apart from Beatrice, there is no image so pure of the search for Divine Beauty which is the quest of the Soul.

It may almost be said that as Beatrice is to Matilda, so Galahad is to Parzival. The Grail itself is not the same thing in the two works.[1] To the German poet it is holy and awesome, "fair blossom of Paradise garden," "the crown of all earthly wishes"; but it has a practical function. It selects kings for distant lands, thus helping to preserve earthly kingdoms in the clean likeness of the heavenly. It abides in its castle, and the hero who wins it removes the curse from its domain and is to abide there too. The Galahad story also gives the Holy Vessel its own castle of Carbonek, but one rarely thinks of it there. Rather, it wanders free through all the land of Logres, appearing, vanishing, at will: now floating by the Cross where Lancelot lies drenched in slumber, now healing Ector and Perceval after their fearful fight, ever burning red as love under its veil of white samite. Parzival, when he wins the Grail, rules over a country of this world which extends protection

[1] The Parzival Grail-kingdom is not unthinkably removed from that sensuous Earthly Paradise into which the Grail Castle later developed in German fancy. See P. S. Barto, *Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus*, i.

to the neighboring kingdom of Arthur; Galahad is king for one brief year in Sarras, the spiritual city, but he recks little of his kingdom, and presently is transported to Paradise. His aim is to behold the Holy Thing, the aim of Parzival is to serve and guard it.

The *Parzival* idea is more congenial to modern minds, but it is the other that was native to the Middle Ages; for their underlying assumption saw the object of life as a vision rather than a deed. And however the assumption may repel, it can never be quite forgotten. The very name of Galahad,—a name shared with many other characters in romance,—has become a symbol of purity. Picture and story, poem and pageant, witness to its hold on the imagination. Galahad however is not the only figure in these books; the human interest, concentrated in Wolfram's poem on one personage, is in Malory scattered among all the sometimes guilty, always groping and stumbling, knights who take the Vow of the Quest. That quest is to break up the realm of Arthur; it sanctifies, yet it also destroys, the earthly life it seeks to save. But it meets the deepest need of its period, it satisfies a restlessness which neither delight in arms nor love of woman nor loyalty to mortal king has been able to assuage. And the books in which Malory tells of it are in their unique beauty the crown of his work, and of the story of the Table Round.[1]

III

Books XI. and XII. are then transitional; and at first there is nothing unusual in the story. Old methods and

[1] The Galahad quest is depreciated in many modern writers. Thus Miss Weston (*Legend of Sir Launcelot*, p. 113): "The false and wholly sickly pseudo-morality of the Grail-sections . . . can not but be utterly distasteful to any healthy mind." Opinion is free.

properties are freely used. It gives no special sense of novelty to read how Lancelot releases from a spell a lady who has agonized these many years in a burning bath, the Adventure is an episode like any other. But when he takes by the hand this fair maid, "naked as a needle," and she presently addresses to him the beautiful words: "Sir, if it please you, will ye go with me hereby into a chapel, that we may give loving and thanking unto God," a finer emotion creeps into the tale, a call is heard from a new depth. This maid is Elaine, the mother of Galahad, and the story proceeds to the tale of his begetting, accomplished in an atmosphere of holy mysteries unlike that of common *amours*. The episode is preceded by the passing of the Grail before Lancelot's eyes in the castle of King Pelles, cousin to Joseph of Arimathea: a little dove, coming in at the window, with a small golden censer in her mouth, is a lovely symbol of the purity and worship to which the castle is dedicate. But it is to be noted that the advent of the Grail is accompanied by a succinct yet explicit prediction of disaster: "Oh Jesu," said Sir Lancelot, "what may this mean?" "This is," said the king, "the richest thing that any man hath living. And when this thing goeth about, the Round Table shall be broken: and wit thou well," said the king, "this is the holy Sangreal that ye have here seen."[1]

The ensuing insanity of Lancelot, due to Guenevere's misunderstanding his relations with Elaine, deepens the shadows. It is customary for mediæval protagonists to go mad for an undefined but ample number of years. Tristram had preceded Lancelot in the fashion. But Tristram's madness was succinctly narrated in a half-jocund way, except for one brief scene when he is at the point of recovery and his little brachet recognizes him

[1] *Morte Darthur.*, xi., 2, p. 126.

though Iseult does not. The madness of Lancelot is, on the other hand, rendered with a good deal of realistic and psychological power. Lancelot, even in the vesture of a fool and out of his wits, is Lancelot still; indeed it may almost be said that he is Lancelot for the first time. At all events it is after this insanity is healed by the Grail that he begins to possess the magnetism which has been conventionally ascribed to him all along. It is as if the breath of the Vessel had awakened him to life. No one can help feeling the pathos of his sojourn with Elaine, the acknowledged mother of his son, an honored, sad figure, kept wisely in the background. Under the self-chosen name of Le Chevalier Malfet, the knight who hath trespassed, Lancelot lives with her exiled in the Joyous Isle, and, being Lancelot, he never interferes with the joy, but adds to it by his gracious bearing. Only, "every day once, for any mirths that all the ladies might make him, he would once every day look toward the realm of Logres, where King Arthur and Queen Guenevere was. And then would he fall upon a weeping as his heart should tobrast."[1] This is the Lancelot who is loved by all the world.

Meantime the court is plunged in sorrow for his vanishing, and many a good knight is in search of him. This also is according to the rules: it is a sort of game, one of the commonest devices in romance. One character disappears, his brothers in arms set out to find him, they too disappear, and others depart in search of them; adventures galore happen to everybody by the way, and any length of time may elapse before the chase is ended and the circle rounds on itself. Malory condenses what might become tedious, and manages his conventional quest very well. Motifs of the old secular

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xii., 6, p. 152.

order are interwoven in it with others which suggest forces hitherto unknown. New knights emerge into prominence; several, Bors, Lionel, and Ector, belong to the House of Lancelot, another, Percivale, is to be second only to Galahad in the achievement of the Grail.

Before long, these knights become vivid personalities. Bors is the finest and the most lovable of them, and it is Bors, to whom several chapters are devoted in Book XI., who has the rarest aptitude for spiritual things. Bors is first to see Galahad, in the arms of his mother, and to rejoice that his great kinsman is no longer childless. To him are open the mystic Adventures of Carbonek,—the fragrance of all the spicery in the world, the sight of the little dove, of the maiden bearing the Grail. He has the clearest glimpses yet vouchsafed of mysteries related to a past full of meaning. "Anon withal there came an old man into the hall, and he sat him down in a fair chair and there seemed to be two adders about his neck; and then the old man had an harp and there he sang an old song how Joseph of Arimathea came into this land."[1] The old man, the old song! Phantoms of ancient, holy, forgotten things! An altar of silver, illumined in a great light as it were a summer light, a wavering image of a Bishop kneeling before it; blinding swords of naked silver hovering overhead; and Bors must go, unworthy to see more.

Percivale is the other knight etched sharply in Book XI.; and his figure has a greater interest, because he bears the name of the first Grail protagonist.[2] But he has lost everything except his name. He is the son to Pellinore and brother to Aglovale, a commonplace knight, and to Lamorak. Therefore he belongs to the

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xi., 5, p. 132.

[2] He is mentioned in the Gareth book, and in book x., ch. 23, the story is told of his coming to court and being hailed by a dumb maiden.

great family engaged in feud with the House of Gawain. The intensely secular character of his family makes it strange to find him here among the knights elect to the things of the spirit, yet here he is, apart from his kin, as Gareth is apart from the House of Gawain. Malory's studies of family groups have a good deal of interest and unconventionality.

There is a slight hint of Percivale's original story, when he and Aglovale leave their mother despite her entreatings: "Ah sweet mother," said Sir Percivale, "we may not (stay), for we be come of king's blood of both parties, and therefore, mother, it is our kind to haunt arms and noble deeds."[1] She swoons at his departure as in the old story, but is not seen again. Percivale, seeking Lancelot, fights unwitting with Ector de Maris bound on the same quest; the Grail, passing by, heals them both as they lie on the ground; and to Sir Percivale comes a glimmer of the holy sight: "So God me help, said Sir Percivale, "I saw a damosel as me thought all in white with a vessel in both her hands and forthwithal I was whole."[2] It is plain that Percivale, like Bors, has the spiritual gift.

Much has now been learned, by indirection, of the Grail and its properties. It has been seen feeding and healing, surrounded by portents of beauty and terror; insensibly the whole atmosphere has changed. So back to the hall at Camelot, where Palomides has just taken his place among the knights who hold their annual Feast of the Spirit and wait as usual for the greatest Adventure of the year to befall. Arthur will not go to his meat on that day till he has seen such Adventure. It has never failed him, it will not fail him now.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xi., 10, p. 139.
[2] *Ibid.*, xi., 14, p. 144.

IV

Never before, not even in the good days of Merlin, was there an Adventure like to this. The sword floating in the marble stone, the letters in the Siege Perilous, Lancelot's summons to the convent where he dubs a young lad knight, prepare the mind. And now all doors and windows of the hall are shut by supernatural means, yet is the hall not greatly darked (shut windows in those days before glass naturally mean darkness), and a good man and ancient, clothed in white, brings with him the young knight in red, without sword or shield, and places him in the Siege Perilous. And Galahad, named by the mystic letters, sits him serenely where no knight has dared to claim his place, though fearsome legends of things well-nigh forgotten speak of one who once had dared, and of fiery hands bearing him off to torment. Yet to Galahad naught befalls but good; and rumors fly, and many say to the queen, who bears herself with queenly frankness however her heart may ache, that he resembles much unto Sir Lancelot.

Presently Galahad has achieved the sword of the stone; and a weeping damsel has announced to Lancelot that he is no longer the best knight of the world. By this time all understand what will shortly come to pass; and the king calls his last tournament, sure that after the quest of the Sangreal he will never again see his beloved knights whole together. Then after Evensong in the great Minster, when the knights are gathered in hall, comes the Visit of the Holy Vessel. The scene must be quoted, however familiar:

> Then anon they heard cracking and crying of thunder. . . . In the midst of this blast entered a sunbeam more

clearer by seven times than ever they saw day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then began every knight to behold other, and either saw other by their seeming fairer than ever they saw afore. Not for then there was no knight might speak one word a great while, and so they looked everyman on other as they had been dumb. Then there entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite, but there was none might see it nor who bare it. And there was all the hall fulfilled with good odors and every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in the world. And when the Holy Grail had been borne through the hall, then the Holy Vessel departed suddenly, that they wist not where it became: then had they all breath to speak. And then the king yielded thankings to God, of His good grace that He had sent them.[1]

The true Advent of the Grail, shedding beauty, shedding radiance, source of most satisfying food, source of unquenchable desire! As all sit awestruck, vistas suddenly open, behind the order of chivalry, beyond the confines of sense. Still abiding in time, men become conscious of eternal things. Who is that old man clothed in white? Is he the same who appeared to Bors, singing the old song of Joseph of Arimathea? Is he perhaps Joseph himself,—Joseph, who knew in the flesh Our Lord Jesus Christ, who buried Him and was sustained in prison by His Blood? Men's wonder leaves the Land of Logres, to seek far centuries and secrets hidden in the Counsels of Heaven.

Yet it is interesting to see how entirely the new emotions are in harmony with the old. The stress on noble lineage, so marked in the chivalric ideal, finds its climax in the honor paid to the holy and ancient lineage of

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xiii., 7, p. 171.

Galahad. Guenevere is the person to point it out: and like a queen she bears herself, not shrinking from statement of the lad's splendid inheritance: only, she can apparently not bear to mention the mother, whose claim to holy descent is even more direct than Lancelot's own, she being of the line of Grail-keepers:

> So a lady that stood by the queen said, Madam, for God's sake ought he of right to be so good a knight? Yea, forsooth, said the queen, for he is of all parties come of the best knights of the world and of the highest lineage, for Sir Lancelot is come but of the eighth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, ... therefore I dare say they be the greatest gentlemen of the world.[1]

Noble lineage involves responsibility for noble service. And in a way, the aristocratic tradition was the mediæval equivalent for the modern historic sense. It linked the present with the past, affording glimpses of continuity and of august purpose in the scheme of things. Perspective and causality, absent in the lighter phases of romance, enter with Galahad and the Grail. Dignity is added to knightly life: Arthur and the Table Round are summoned to a destiny higher than they had known. Fulfillment is the watchword of the hour, and Galahad is the Fulfiller. The Siege Perilous in which he takes his place is the Siege which Moys, a sinner of Joseph's company, had essayed when the first Christian pilgrims to England were fed in the wilderness by the Grail. The time had not been ripe; the purpose of Christ had been thwarted by sin, and the Grail had vanished. But now the hour has come, the prophecies of Merlin shall be accomplished at last, and the restoration of the Grail to England, through one

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xiii., 7, p. 171.

worthy to attain its mysteries, shall be the consummation of the glory of the Table Round.

The ensuing story is in many respects badly told by Malory. The memories are so confused that without the help of the *Grand San Graal* no one can understand it, and the writer himself seems often to have lost the clue to what he narrates. Yet there is something compelling in these sudden flashes of hidden purpose through the world of sense, in this awesome expansion of time and scale. As the Grail passes through Camelot, passion is on all who see to follow it, for not only Galahad, but all the Table Round, are summoned to this work. So the knights, as it were under compulsion, swear the great Oath of the Quest. The lures of love and war grow faint, an impulse is upon them like sweet madness, and they ride forth on the greatest Adventure that has ever befallen, the Adventure that shall search and divide, in which only the elect can thrive.

Arthur does not want them to go. Not wont to lament when his knights set forth on adventure, he is now possessed by a tragic instinct that this Quest will prove the end of the Order of the Table Round. There is something deeply dramatic about this instinct of his; it hints at that clash between the pursuit of earthly and of heavenly good which the Middle Ages felt more keenly than we, and which was to them the ultimate pain of mortal life. It is plain already that loyalty to the beloved woman may be at odds with loyalty to the Overlord; now that another summons sounds, though it sound from on high, though it be holy and compelling, the heart of the king scents danger, and he sends his knights out heavily, remaining at home, lonely and sad. That is assuredly the right place for him. Malory's version in this respect is far finer than some others, for in-

stance *Perceval le Gallois*, which sends Arthur also on the Quest. The reason is the same as that which led Malory to suppress Arthur's many *amours* as completely as the exigencies of the dénouement would permit. The king is the center, the magnet, of the three great forces in the story; he must not himself be subject in marked degree to any one, but must remain fixed and focal albeit he forfeit thereby some of the humanness which gives him in other versions more vitality. In him alone, the balance of forces is preserved; and on this very account he stands as a somewhat unsympathetic and apathetic figure, till the storm breaks at the end.

Arthur's instinct is justified, and the Quest, which should have been the fulfillment of glory, becomes the beginning of sorrows. And the inevitable question rises: Is it well for the veiled forces that control destiny to come too near,—to reveal themselves, even obscurely on that serene surface of life which they can stir to so insistent an unrest? Paradox and perplexity attend the pathway of the Seekers. The exact purport of Galahad's achievement and of the thwarted quest of the other knights is perhaps never made quite clear. The retrieving of wrong is in it, the release of sinful souls from æonian torture, the purification of the spirit, all leading toward the attainment of the Beatific Vision in the unveiled Presence of the Grail. But confusion as of a drifting cloud is over the tale. The greatest promise is never fulfilled. The Good Knight, heir of many prayers and hopes, was to succeed where his ancestors had failed, and to restore holiness to the land by restoring the Grail. But the visitation of the Grail is a fleeting glory. It disappears across the mystic sea, and the Good Knight with it. As for the other knights, many die in the quest; with one or two exceptions the

rest return frustrate. The Land of Logres remains unredeemed.

And so it is hard to understand why Merlin the national prophet so eagerly predicted the coming of the Holy Vessel, and why all eyes intent on the glory of England had looked for it. But the very break and failure in the scheme of the original epic in its maturity, is characteristic of the age. For the conviction was forced on men that the New Law could never be established in the Land of Logres nor the Grail find its home there. The pessimistic asceticism of the Middle Ages took possession of the tale. That pessimism had transformed the glowing vision of the primitive Church, a vision of a Holy City descending to dwell among men, into the longing for a Paradise beyond the river of death. It sought not to "build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land," but rather to withdraw men to the solitude where heart and voice might sink oppressed beneath the contemplation of a Jerusalem the Golden in Heaven. The achievement of earthly good, of national holiness, slipped beyond the horizon; the central and supreme aim became the mystic union of the individual with God, possible only when the spirit was divorced from interest in the things of sense. The social, the national hope dropped out of the Quest altogether, as it had dropped like a Utopia from the Christian dream; and while faint suggestions of the broader early thought pervade the story, interest in the Grail-books centers at last exclusively in the salvation of the individual and his progress along the Mystic Way.

CHAPTER V

THE PAGEANT OF THE HOLY GRAIL (*Continued*)

BOOKS XIII–XVII

I

IN one sense, the fears of Arthur prove needless, for it soon becomes evident that, to the great majority of the knights, the great Adventure is no adventure at all. Presently they will be only too eager to get back to the old life again: Sarras has no charms for them, to rival Camelot.

Their diverse experiences are narrated, as the case may be, with reverence, with sympathy, or with refreshing humor. The action in the Grail books may be rather shadowy, but the people moving through the shadows have, strangely enough, come thoroughly alive. A few important knights have received careful treatment from the first, but now every least person is etched with strokes, broad or fine, but always firm. Individual temperament has much to do with the dramatic quality in this portion of the *Morte Darthur*, and even the most dull and allegorical adventures gain point when one realizes how cleverly they are assigned. In the early books, things might often as well happen to one person as to another. Now, occurrences are no longer simple events; they are revelations and tests of personality. One feels a more intimate quality in the

affections which unite the knights; human situations abound. What a picture could be made of Guenevere's face gazing on Galahad! What pungency in the dialogue between the two,—the queen wistful and haughty, the youth disconcerted and abashed by that sharp scrutiny, yet quite able to hold his own in repartee: "And son unto Launcelot she said he was. . . . Then Sir Galahad was a little ashamed, and said, 'Madam, sith ye know in certain, wherefore do ye ask it me?'"[1]

Does the portraiture gain in power because character, properly speaking, only develops in proportion as the soul awakes? At all events, it is in these books that the miracle of personality begins to emerge out of the daze of romantic conventions. To follow these knights one by one, on their quest, as we are now to do, is to watch them escape from the Arthurian frieze in which Malory's people are caught at the beginning, into the living round.

II Quests of Gawain & Ector

Precedence, in our discussion as at the court, should naturally belong to Gawain; but the Mystic Way is not for him. First to swear to the Quest, he is also first to abandon it. Little has been seen of Gawain since those early days when his vindictive instincts were rebuked and put under discipline. All verbal honor is accorded him, and indications now and then hint that he is really doing his best to live up to his vows. Yet he is the same Gawain still. The Tristram books report his underhand slaying of Sir Lamorak, and now, in the Grail-books, Malory completes his degradation. The treatment emphasizes the idea suggested from the outset: Gawain is heir to a pagan tradition, which reluctantly and imperfectly tries to assimilate Christian ideas.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xiii., 8, p. 173.

In continental works, Gawain, though never the Grail-winner, is often a holy and consecrated person, close second to Perceval himself. The prose romance, *Perceval le Gallois*, for instance, dwells at length on his exploits in achieving sundry secondary Grail adventures, and exalts him almost to the rank of sanctity. How Malory came to present so opposite a picture is hard to surmise; some though not all the romances from which he drew, show a similar tendency to degrade Gawain in favor of Lancelot. At all events, Malory contrives out of disparate elements to evolve a portrait consistent and extremely human. Never are the strokes more felicitous than here. His Gawain in quest of the Grail is almost ridiculously ill at ease, and the figure affords important comedy relief.

Helpless though he is among holy things, Gawain admires Galahad, and wants to be with him. But his desire is sharply snubbed. "Sir," said a monk whom he encounters at the beginning of his Quest, "he will not of your fellowship." "Why?" said Sir Gawain. "Sir," said he, "for ye be wicked and sinful and he is full blessed."[1] Gawain does not appear to resent this brutal candor; perhaps it is because he does not feel overmuch respect toward the remarks of holy men. It is amusing to see how lightly he answers the various hermits whom he meets, when they try to restrain him. One of them, having heard his confession,—for Gawain is a good Catholic,—desires to impose penance on him: "'Nay,' said Sir Gawain, 'I may do no penance, for we knights adventurous oft suffer great woe and pain.' 'Well,' said the good man, and then he held his peace,"[2] —and Gawain rides away.

It is no surprise to find that he is bored as he pro-

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xiii., 16, p. 185.

[2] *Ibid.*, xiii., 16, p. 186.

ceeds. He finds "not the tenth part of adventure as he was wont to do. For Sir Gawain rode from Whitsuntide until Michaelmas and found none adventure that pleased him."[1] The handling is certainly clever: just such is the usual fate of the secular man when he attempts the adventures of the spirit. Soon Gawain becomes as he announces without reserve, "nigh weary of this quest," and eager for an excuse to leave it. Ector, brother to Lancelot, becomes his boon companion and Ector feels in much the same way; indeed he says that he has met with twenty knights who have made the same complaint! Ector and Gawain agree that it is not much use for any one to seek the Grail except the four knights who have not their peers in these matters, —Lancelot, Bors, Percivale and Galahad. Rueful, and perhaps touched with a little real regret, they come in their riding to a ruined Chapel, and seating themselves in the sieges thereof make their orisons a long while; for in those days even the most unspiritual knights apparently had an excellent habit of saying their prayers. But praying makes men sleepy,—and falling into slumber as they sit, they are visited by marvelous dreams. They wake to see a fair and terrible portent,—an arm clothed with red samite, the mystic color, that held a great candle burning clear which passed before them into the Chapel and then vanished away. A voice follows, addressing them as knights of evil faith, and warns them that they may not come to the adventures of the Sangreal.

So much and no more contact with spiritual mysteries is vouchsafed them. Proceeding, not overgrieved at the news, Gawain is so greedy for a joust that he rides against his own old comrade Sir Uwaine and slays

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvi., i., p. 213.

him.[1] He is heavy for his misadventure, and it seems as if at last his worldly thoughts might be turned to heavenly things. But no! A hermit who expounds at length his "advisioun" rates him soundly, and reiterates to him and Ector that they go to seek that they shall never find. Gawain with a touch of insolent satisfaction draws an inference from these admonitions: "Sir . . . it seemeth me by your words that for our sins it will not avail us to travel in this quest. . . . An I had leisure I would speak with you, but my fellow here Sir Ector is gone and abideth me yonder beneath the hill."[2] So Gawain runs away from the sermon,—and after languidly pursuing the Quest a little longer,—for he has a tenacious nature and hates to give up anything on which he has embarked,—he is overthrown in joust by Galahad, receiving, as had been predicted, the biggest buffet he has ever had, from the sword of the stone, which he had vainly tried to draw. This is the end: with disgusted relief, he abandons the Quest forever.

Ector, his "fellow here," is as worldly-minded as Gawain. But he is of a different type. The keynote to his character is his adoring devotion to his great brother Lancelot. It is of Lancelot that he is perpetually thinking when he ought to be thinking about the Grail: his one little vision at his only point of contact with spiritual things concerns Lancelot rather than himself. For he dreams in the Chapel that Lancelot is beaten and placed on an ass, and that he comes to a fair well but seeks in vain to drink of the water, which perpetually sinks away from him. There is truth in dreams, and a

[1] He kills Bagdemagus too. The prose *Lancelot* says that Gawain killed twenty-two knights of the Round Table while he was in the Quest; and Malory calls him "a great murderer," "a destroyer of good knights."

[2] *Morte Darthur*, xvi., 5, p. 219.

loving heart, even a dull one, can get very near in them to the fate of its beloved. The same dream has a prophecy of Ector's own future; for it tells how he comes to a wedding in a rich man's house, but is turned away, learning that there is no room for him.

Ector is lost to sight for a long time after Gawain's quest is finished. But at the last, when Lancelot is sitting within the Grail castle, where the Holy Vessel fulfills the table with all manner of meats, and hearts are full of still deep ecstasy, there comes a knocking at the door and an importunate cry to undo. Then Pelles the Grail king calls through a window to that intrusive knight, and bids him begone for that the Holy Thing is there. "And when Sir Ector de Maris understood that his brother was there, for he was the man in the world that he most dread and loved; and then he said, 'Ah God, now doubleth my sorrow and shame.'"[1] So he rode swiftly away as fast as his horse would carry him, and that was the end of his quest.

III Quests of Percivale & Bors

Thus fare the worldly-minded: baffled at every turn, —enveloped in blankness when through curiosity or gregarious instinct they seek to penetrate the spiritual realm. Their failure, however, is no fault of that strange region, wherein are adventures for such as are fit to meet them,—the knights spiritual,—Percivale, Bors, Lancelot and Galahad. But these adventures are ghostly weird,—dreams and "advisiouns," encounters with dragons and wondrous monsters, fiends driven from the bodies of dead hermits, burning water beneath the prow of a ship that bears a fair temptress away yelling and shrieking; adventures that are no longer comfortable

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvii., 16, p. 260.

ends in themselves as the wont has been, but rather symbols of something unearthly. The fact carries with it the need for long explanations, proffered by convenient holy men. With these the reader could well dispense; the more mystery the better. It is pleasant to hear Gawain's queer dream of black and white bulls, but it is tiresome to have to learn that these bulls represent knights chaste and unchaste; one sympathizes a little with Gawain's own tendency to skip the sermon. But these little tediums must be put up with. For all insensibly the world of romance has been left for that of allegory,—or to speak more truly, the whole romantic world, intact with all its trappings, has become a parable, a sense-veil through which marvelous meanings glimmer.

It is interesting to ask if any principle of choice has governed the selection of those knights spiritual, who, each in his own degree and after his own kind, are privileged to attain the Grail. Lancelot and Galahad are of the holy lineage of St. Joseph, so is Bors: the prejudiced devotion of Malory's originals to Lancelot's House is plain enough. Yet Bors' brother, Lionel, is the worst knight these books present, and Percivale, the fourth knight singled out, comes of a very bad stock. The "gens" of King Pellinore, so hated by the "gens" of Gawain, is, apart from Percivale himself, peculiarly unsanctified. But Percivale is next to Galahad in holiness. Ector on the other hand, half-brother to Lancelot, is comrade to Gawain; all that he gets of the Grail is to be turned away from its doors. Thus sporadically works the principle of election to spiritual gifts.

The Percivale of these books is an emasculated figure, and the treatment of him marks the last stage in a progressive de-humanization. A transitional stage is

found in the curious *Perceval le Gallois*. In this ascetic romance, Perceval has lost all his attractions, to say nothing of his story. He has taken on the traits of Galahad; physical chastity has become the chief characteristic of the ere-while lover of Blancheflour or Kondwiramur. Malory's Grail-books carry the process still further; a monk is here slightly concealed under the trappings of knighthood. Not without reason is Percivale to stay in the city of Sarras when the others come home; he is of no value to the court or the world, and will not be missed by them.

Gawain's adventures are scattered through these books, and the light note they strike is always welcome. Those of the other knights are more consecutive. The short fourteenth book, only ten chapters long, which is devoted to Percivale, is the least interesting in the Grail sequence. At the outset are a few graceful touches. Riding in search of Galahad, Percivale meets a recluse who turns out to be his aunt—a reminiscence of the real Perceval story,—and she asks after his mother. Percivale's reply has its own beauty: "Truly, said he, I heard none of her, but I dream of her much in my sleep, and therefore I wot not whether she be dead or on live." He has to be told of her death, from sorrow at his departure,—the touching episode in the old tale being tenaciously preserved,—but this cold Percivale shows no hint of penitence, and it is easy to lose all sympathy for him on seeing how he takes the news: "Now God have mercy on her soul! . . . It sore forthinketh me, but all we must change the life. Now fair aunt tell me, what is the knight?"[1] Curiosity about Galahad is all very well,—but there are moments when it seems out of place.

Percivale has no such trouble as Gawain and Ector

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xiv., 1, p. 193.

in meeting adventures. They thicken around him,—no natural events, though often familiar enough in type, but spiritual tests, connoting depth of experience, events which really occur not on the physical plane at all but in the inner regions of consciousness. For this figure moves wholly on mystical levels, and the parables of his inner life, despite their ecclesiastical tone and their dullness for the natural man, are told with occasional touches of rare romantic beauty. One hears with awe how Percivale, riding a horse that was "inly black,"[1] comes to the brim of "a rough water the which roared,"[2] and makes the Sign of the Cross upon the steed's forehead: whereupon "when the fiend felt him so charged he shook off Sir Percivale and he went into the water crying and roaring, making great sorrow and it seemed to him that the water brent."[3] The atmosphere darkens, the sense of hidden issues grows more plain. Hints of heavenly help meet onslaughts from the lower regions; at the end of the book, Percivale, having vanquished his temptations, which spring mostly from the flesh, vanishes from sight in a little boat where blessed company shall be his by and by. The temper of this fourteenth book recalls that of the *Grand San Graal;* the same prolix puerility so far as external narrative is concerned, the same evident depth of religious feeling, the same beauty as of a light from other suns than ours, shining abruptly at times through the murk.

The human note, absent in Percivale, is strikingly felt in the story of the second knight of the Grail, Sir Bors. Bors is lovable from start to finish; and he is studied with the affection of an old Dutch master for his sitter. Like many of these models, Bors is a very plain person. He is not so perfect as Percivale; he has fallen once from

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xiv., 5, p. 198.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*, 6, p. 198.

chastity, but the episode when he brings his little son Elin le Blank to court is read with natural pleasure. He is neither a strong knight nor a fascinating one; he has no accomplishments either in love or war; even in matters spiritual, two others at least surpass him. In every way, he belongs quite to the second rank, and is fully aware of it. His latent spiritual powers are never analyzed or described. But we know without explanations that he is of those pure in heart for whom the great Beatitude was spoken.

Simple human loyalty is the keynote of Bors' character, and it is through his human affections that temptation reaches him. He is not called like Percivale to struggle for the preservation of his own chastity, nor like Gawain to rise above light-mindedness. No great earthly passion drags him down, nor does he feel such burning hunger for spiritual vision as consumes a Lancelot despite his sin. Bors is a very unselfish man; he has reached a degree of true detachment from personal interests. His test accordingly is the difficult necessity of choosing between rival duties to other people. For he meets his brother Lionel, naked, bound, cruelly beaten by thorns and seemingly at the point of death; but as he dresses him to the rescue, a girl's voice cries near by: "St. Mary, succor your maid!" and the damsel in sorest peril a maid can know, beseeches him to save her honor. "When Bors heard her say thus he had so much sorrow there he nyst not what to do . . . then lift he up his eyes and said weeping: "Fair sweet lord Jesu Christ, whose liegeman I am, keep Lionel my brother . . . and for pity of you and for Mary's sake I shall succor this maid.'"[1] It seems as if Christ had refused his prayer, for presently the body of Lionel is shown to him. Murder is a material disaster; dishonor

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvi., 9, p. 225.

is of the spirit. Bors, sorrowing deeply over his brother's death, yet feels no penitence, so assured is he that to protect purity is a greater thing than to save life.

Lionel, however, was not really killed at all: and he can not take this lofty view. The sequel to this Adventure is perhaps the most dolorous among tales of the strife of brothers. For Bors and Lionel, unlike Balin and Balan, fight knowing each other, the combat forced by the raging resentment of Lionel. Bors in this crisis is a non-resistant, an unnatural rôle for a Knight of the Round Table! He kneels down meekly and awaits the onslaught of Lionel; only when his brother has slain a hermit who would fain have intervened, and when Colgrevance his champion who has thrown himself chivalrously into the *mêlée*, has been killed, does he lift up his hand in self-defense, weeping: "Well wot ye that I am not afeared of you greatly, but I dread the wrath of God and this is an unkindly war. . . . Now God have mercy upon me though I defend my life against my brother."[1] Then comes a portent,—a cloud lighting between them in likeness of fire, so that they are supernaturally restrained. And Bors, perfected in piety and self-control, is led to the holy ship, where he is to rejoice in the fellowship of the waiting Percivale.

Bors' power of spiritual discernment is so great that he might well remain with Percivale and Galahad, far from these our wars in the spiritual city. Such is not his end however: he returns, the Quest concluded, sole survivor of that strange voyage,—returns to tell the tale and to play his part in the last act of the tragedy. It could not be otherwise. Such a man could not sever himself from human responsibilities and the life of his fellows. His affections center in his dogged devotion

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvi., 16, p. 234.

to the Head of his House, his great cousin Lancelot,—a devotion as great as that of Ector but perhaps more clear-sighted. This pure knight perfected in rectitude and unselfishness, is loyal henchman and comrade to the greater man ravaged by passion and sin. Bors is not a leading figure in the last books, after the return from the Quest. But stanch, close-lipped, unhappy, he is always close to Lancelot's side when the storms break and the scandal explodes and his Chief appears as arch-traitor to the sacred vows of the Round Table.

IV Quest of Lancelot

The key to much in the Grail-books is found, as already said, in their hints of mystical experience. Certain phases of such experience are suggested by the story of the minor characters. The dangers besetting the uninitiate who try to enter the arcana are indicated in several episodes at the outset of the Quest, as in the failure of Meliot of Logres to achieve the adventure reserved for Galahad, and the death of Uwaine les Avoutres. Gawain and Ector do not suffer in the Quest because they are only formally in it. Bors and Percivale suffer, but though they must undergo purgation, they tread mostly the illuminative way, for the disciplines to which they are subjected are designed rather to enlighten them than to serve as expiation. Beyond the illuminative region, however, they hardly mount. Even in their great hour when they behold the open glory of the Lord, a sensible Presence blesses them rather than an inward union.

It is Lancelot, real protagonist of these books and of the whole *Morte Darthur*, who knows every stage of the journey. For the most part, the Quest is the way of

purgation to him, and he finds it bitter and dark. He "repented him greatly," for all that he did was greatly done. Even when he passes furthest, he lives much in darkness. Yet he has latent capacity to breathe on higher levels. At some points, purification certainly merges into enlightenment, and at the consummation of his quest, shrouded prevision at least of the joys of union is vouchsafed to him in trance. Through the successive stages of his experience may be traced a new apprehension slowly awakening, the advance by a thorny path to consciousness on a plane unvisited by mere lovers of good knights and ladies fair.

Even the portrait of Bors, whose plain human qualities are so substantial in contrast with the exalted unrealities of Percivale, seems thin beside that of this greatest of earthly knights, the despairing seeker, who of all sinful men gains the clearest vision, yet who is stunned by that vision and returns to fall to his old love again. Lancelot in the Grail-books escapes at last from convention, and in achieving heart-break achieves life. He does not undertake the Quest lightly; the force driving him is a real torture of spiritual desire. That conflict of loyalties which was the tragedy of mediæval life and the doom of the chivalric ideal, now quickens in the heart of the protagonist; and through the struggle, he who has seemed at times a mere lay-figure becomes a living man.

Lancelot's story surrounds that of the others; it is recurrent, opening at the outset of the Quest, dropped while other knights are followed and finally resumed toward the close. The first stage of his struggle is suggested when the damosel who announces the Quest greets him with pity,—a feeling that he is not accustomed to inspire,—because he is no longer the best

knight in the world. "As touching that, I know well I was never the best," says Lancelot: but in spite of his genuine modesty, every one knows how precious his reputation has been to him, and how sobering must be the discovery that he is to take a second place. The fact is soon proved, for when Lancelot is started on the Quest, he encounters Galahad, who overthrows him at a stroke.

This is the signal for spiritual adventures increasingly searching and strange. In dark mood, Lancelot "rode overthwart and endlong in a wild forest, and held no path but as wild adventure led him."[1] Gawain and Ector, Percivale and Bors, may know pleasant fellowship on the Quest; Lancelot must be alone. His ensuing story is conceived by the religious imagination at white heat. It is the product of the same period which set great sequences to solemn Gregorian chanting, which made mosaics where angels and archangels suggest invisible forces better than anything else in art except certain abstract Oriental forms. There are passages in these books which might find high place in direct religious literature, there are others where the romance of the interior life,—its contrition, humility and aspiration,—are expressed in beautiful symbols. Such are Lancelot's confession to the hermit, the scene beside the wayside Cross, or that other scene, near a Chapel waste and broken yet filled with supernatural light, clear image of the sin-ravaged soul. What psychological truth in Lancelot's dazed slumber while the Grail goes by, in his half-paralyzed perception of spiritual mysteries! What reality in his bitter self-accusations, his penitential search!

In the latter portions of the story, the mystic sequence

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xiii., 17, p. 187.

grows plainer and plainer. Obedient to a vision, Lancelot comes to the seashore and finds a little ship waiting. "And as soon as he was within the ship there he felt the most sweetness that ever he felt, and he was fulfilled with all thing that he thought on or desired."[1] It is the illuminative way. "Fair sweet Father Jesu Christ," he said, "I wot not in what joy I am, for this joy passeth all earthly joys that ever I was in." So he sleeps, and on waking finds a bier with the body of the gentlewoman that was Sir Percivale's sister,—she who has given her life-blood that another woman might live. Romance yields no more exquisite situation. We are not told what winnowings of the wind of God swept all but clean the soul of Guenevere's lover, alone on the sea with this emblem of purity and sacrifice. Reticence is best. With this holy body, the hot lover, the sinful knight, abides a month or more on the drifting waters.

So purified, so illumined, he is ready at last for fellowship with Galahad. Few relations in fiction are more touching than those between the mature, sinning, repentant Lancelot, and the son to whom he has transmitted that spiritual capacity innate in his own heritage but obstructed by his sin. It is a tender imagination which grants them long quiet intercourse before the end, and right sweetly and nobly does each bear himself. Lancelot has learned before now who it was that overthrew him at the outset of the Quest, and has greeted the knowledge with his own humility and courtesy: "Well," he sighed, "meseemeth that good knight should pray for me unto the High Father that I fall not to sin again."[2] A fine artistic instinct holds the two a long time apart. Their meeting when it comes is full of human beauty. During half a year, father and son

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvii., 13, p. 254. [2] *Ibid.*, xv., 4, p. 210.

abide together on the seacoast, within the ship where the incorrupt body of Percivale's sister bears them company. It is a lovely human interlude in the sternness of the Holy Way. Galahad is perfect in reverent tenderness toward his father, Lancelot bears himself with a hushed awe. The end comes in time: Galahad is summoned away by a knight in white armor:

> Then he went to his father and kissed him sweetly and said: Fair sweet father, I wot not when I shall see you more till I see the Body of Jesus Christ. I pray you, said Lancelot, pray ye to the high Father that He hold me in His service. And so he took his horse and there they heard a Voice that said: Think for to do well, for the one shall never see the other before the dreadful day of doom. Now, son Galahad, said Lancelot, syne we shall depart and never see other, I pray to the High Father to conserve me and you both. Sir, said Galahad, no prayer availeth so much as yours. And therewith Galahad entered into the forest. And the wind arose, and drove Lancelot more than a month throughout the sea, where he slept but little but prayed to God that he might see some tidings of the Sangraal.[1]

Thus prepared by holy contacts and by long solitude in prayer, Lancelot is ready to fulfill his quest: ready as one may be in whom old sin, pruned indeed by severe and anguished discipline, is yet not torn out from the soil of the soul. The mystic ship brings him to the castle of Carbonek, whither he had been led in earlier days to fulfill fate in the begetting of Galahad. Elaine is dead, but Pelles the Maimed King still awaits the Healer, and solemn mysteries inhabit the castle where the Holy Vessel has its earthly home. Lancelot comes

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvii., 14, p. 256.

closer far to these mysteries than at his former visit. Yet,—and what truth there is in the symbol!—the fulfillment of desire is vouchsafed him only in dream. He approaches the Chamber of the Sangraal, and his yearning is evident in his prayer as he kneels in front of that closed door behind which a voice is singing with unearthly sweetness. He is forbidden entrance; yet through the door, silently opened to reveal clearness as if all the torches of the world had been there, he sees such things that he can not stay without. Disregarding words of warning, he peers in, to aid, as he thinks, the priest who bears the burden of the Redeemer before the silver altar where the Holy Vessel glows through its veil. Then a breath of fire smites him through the visage and he falls to earth and has no power to rise. And for four and twenty days, which correspond to the years of his sinning, he lies as one dead, rejoicing in marvels of great sweetness. Thus in anguish and terror is accomplished his closest approach to those mysteries which for Galahad and Percivale hold full joy and perfect calm. Thus only, as it were in trance, when the evil flesh is laid to sleep, may the unitive way be known to men of sin, with however mighty desire they yearn for it. It is a great handling, full of cryptic power; it shadows forth as could be done only by one who knew, the commerce with the high things of God of one who is a sinner but might be a saint.

Lancelot awakes meekly, and gives thanks for even the veiled Presence he has beheld, and for fellowship with those who serve the Grail. And as he sits at table fulfilled of meats by the Holy Vessel, the loud knocking of Ector sounds from without. Learning that Lancelot is there, he flees abashed to bear the news to court; and to that court Lancelot now returns for his

sorrow and undoing, assured that all which may be vouchsafed him in the Quest of the Sangraal has been achieved.

V Quest of Galahad

Light in these books is focused on Galahad. His grave and shining youth moves on a path gray with memories; he is called on to bring to a conclusion the episodes of a half-finished tale. It is the *rôle* of the Pure Knight, so long awaited, to atone for old wrongs, to achieve deferred feats of spiritual redemption; in thus fulfilling prophecy and satisfying the expectant desire of generations, he accomplishes the patient purpose of God.

Throughout his story, allusions are constant to earlier acts in the drama; vague parallels multiply, to awe and rouse. On every hand he encounters relics of former days. His first sword is that with which Balin had given the Dolorous Stroke to Pelles,—poor Balin, whose faint capacity for spiritual things had harmed men rather than helped them because the time was not ripe. His second, the Sword with the Strange Hangings, is most marvelous of all swords in romance not excepting Excalibur, for it is the authentic sword of David, and its scabbard is made from the wood of the Tree of Life. His white shield with the red cross has been awaiting him for centuries; it is the very shield given by Joseph of Arimathea to Mordrains king of Sarras, whereon the Crucified appeared to convert that heathen king; and the cross is made with Joseph's blood. Mordrains himself lies blind, in extreme decrepitude, living for six hundred years till his prayer be granted that he see the Good Knight who shall finish the Mysteries of

Britain; and Galahad releases him tenderly from the body. Woe to those, whether Bagdemagus the good old king or Melias the untried knight, who seek to usurp the deeds of Galahad: strange deeds they are, for he has to aid, not the living but the dead, stanching the flames in which sinful kinsfolk of his have languished, bringing repeatedly to fevered souls the cool touch of his compassion.

Galahad, as he proceeds on his appointed path, is not a very human figure. He does not appear much interested in his own pursuits: his adversaries have no solidity to them and the ancient signs are performed as in a dream. The very climax of the old story, the healing of the Maimed King, is incidentally slurred over; interest in it has lapsed, till the Dolorous Stroke is ascribed at one point to Balin, at another to the lance which strikes Pelles through the flank in Solomon's ship. Confusion prevails, and the result is easy to dismiss as a hopeless tangle of inconsistencies.

Yet that can be no mean or casual art which created a figure whose beauty, when all is said, haunts men through the generations. Taken by himself, it is true that Galahad lacks human qualities; he must be taken in his setting. He is pure symbol,—a rainbow apparition, untouched by shadow, among the ruder passions that sway romance. He shines like a visitant from the world of Fra Angelico in the midst of the dusky chiaroscuro of Rembrandt or the rich tones of Titian. He wears the Pentecostal color of the Spirit, the flame-red of charity, like that of Dante's Love as she dances beside the chariot of Beatrice. He is very silent. Other characters speak at times with copious eloquence. Galahad is laconic. "Gladly," says he, and no more, when asked for some high service. "In the Name of

God," he answers again and again. He achieves his marvels unconsciously, simply, nor is he ever seen long at a time. He is as it were always vanishing. He appears for a moment to rescue some one in distress, to deal a swift stern stroke at an enemy of good; then he is gone, and the eager knights who thirst for his company only hear from him afar. The more worldly men seem to pursue him in their quest rather than the Grail,—their wish to behold Galahad being apparently as near an approach to heavenly desires as they can compass. In a sense, his chief function is to bring other personalities into clearer light, by affording a fixed point for comparison and contrast.

In two relations however Galahad attains reality on his own account. One is when he is with his father; the other is in his charming if phantasmal reflection of loyalty to a chosen lady.

Mediæval imagination could not quite forego this loyalty, even in case of a virgin knight. Ladies may not accompany the knights on this quest; a stern message from Nasciens the hermit excludes them at the beginning. Yet tenderness will have its way; a woman is the central figure, a woman draws together the threads and directs the action during the latter portions of the Grail-books. She is the sister of Percivale,—a ray of purest light serene, blended of sacrifice and holy desire. She is unnamed; but she will always be remembered with the three knights spiritual who attain the Vision, with Bors and Percivale and above all with Galahad.

Hints of her rank are given at the beginning. She is a princess, daughter of King Pellinore, and her damsel, not herself, first summons Galahad to her castle. Thence she leads him to the boat where Percevale and Bors are

waiting; and joyful are the three fellows in that reunion, though Bors, true to his loving nature, sighs for Lancelot. The boat bears them to a greater ship, no less than the Ship of Faith, strangest of all vessels that sail the crowded waters of mediæval fantasy. In this ship, Nasciens, Mordrains and their company had come to Logres, to aid Joseph of Arimathea in the conversion of the land. Ever since, it has been sailing, expectant of the destined day when it shall be honored by the presence of Galahad.

It is a perfect treasure-house of a ship, full of quaintest associations with sanctified ancient things originally collected by the builder King Solomon and his wife: Solomon, as the Bible tells, being a famous virtuoso. Some of the most interesting marvels are the spindles, red, green and white, made from the Tree of Life; but the most important is the Sword of David, known as the Sword of the Strange Hangings. For this sword the Blessed Maid has woven girdles of her own hair, "which I loved well when I was a woman of the world," says she. And after expounding the mysteries of the ship to the three awestruck knights, she binds the sword on Galahad with these girdles as chivalric custom decrees. "Now reck I not though I die," cries she: "For now I hold me one of the blessed maidens of the world, which hath made the worthiest knight of the world." "Damosel," returns Galahad, "Ye have done so much that I shall be your knight all the days of my life."[1] We remember another ship, where Tristram and Iseult drank the fatal potion. Who shall say that the one scene has more truth to experience than the other? Who can assert that the contrast is wholly unconscious?

Presently the nun-like maid completes her life of

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvii., 7, 247.

sacrifice by giving her blood for another lady, with the solemn consent of the three knights who love her well, and by her last commands she is set adrift after her death in a little skiff. There it is that Lancelot finds her, and therein he and Galahad sojourn during the months of their fellowship. As she predicted, the skiff is waiting when the three knights arrive later in the city of Sarras. "In the Name of God, said Percivale, well hath my sister holden us covenant."[1] And there they bury her in the "spiritual place" where later Galahad shall be laid by her side.

The parting from the Holy Maid may be taken as signal for the consummation of the tale. Lancelot attains his fiery vision and makes his way back to the court for his undoing. But for Galahad as for Percivale there can be no return. Galahad fulfills all destined deeds. Then he meets his fellows once more, and together they seek Carbonek the holy castle. Here Galahad had been born: and hither he returns for the fulfillment of his earthly quest.

The tone of the story has insensibly risen from the beginning of these books. Time was when we rode gayly with Gareth or Gawain, listened to the beguiling of Merlin or with jubilant sympathy watched Iseult outwit King Mark. Yet now it seems quite natural to be placed in the Holiest Presence, where fairy lore and mortal passion yield to sacramental mysticism at its most intense. To the Feast of the Grail spread at Carbonek, come knights from West and South and East, from Denmark, Gaul and Ireland. The Vision vouchsafed by the Grail many hundred years before, at the time of the consecration of the first Bishop of England, is now repeated; and this repetition completes the

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvii., 21, p. 267.

solemn rhythm which binds the two phases of the Grail-story together. It is the consummation of more than the life of Galahad and the Quest of the Table Round. The significance is marked by the presence of these other knights who, according to the Gospel prediction, complete the tale of those coming from East and West and North and South to sit down at the heavenly Feast. And now, quaintness and fantasy are at an end; the remaining pages of the Quest have a liturgical solemnity blended with the courage of a child. The same book which tells us of Nimue weaving her spell and Lancelot in the bed of Guenevere, passes with no shock to showing openly Jesus Christ Himself, addressing His true children.

The Saviour, proceeding from the Holy Vessel, speaks in gentle wise: "My knights and my servants and my true children, which be come out of deadly life into spiritual life, I will now no longer hide me from you, but ye shall see now a part of my secrets and of my hidden things. Now hold and receive the high meat which ye have so much desired."[1] So does He Who is "Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest" feed them with the Food of Immortality, and they are fulfilled of their longing. So the Open Vision is granted those who have passed "out of deadly life into spiritual life"; and it brings the word of command which bears them away from the land of Logres.

For that land is never again to be blessed with the veiled Presence of the Holy Grail. "Them of this land, . . . be turned to evil living; therefore I shall disherit them of the honor which I have done them," says the Lord.[2] Galahad, Percivale and Bors, greatly favored, are to accompany the Holy Vessel back to

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvii., 20, p. 265

[2] *Ibid.*

Sarras whence it came. Logres is deserted, and in a sense the main action of the epic, the spiritual action behind the veil of sense, is here concluded in disastrous defeat. The object of the whole plan for which the Table Round exists has been to bring Logres under the new Law. This is the plan which sent Joseph across the sea, which the council in Hell had so vigorously and vainly sought to thwart by the scheme of Merlin, the plan which had so triumphantly persisted in spite of all the infernal powers,—till the very men trusted with its fulfillment have proved themselves the instrument of its failure. For it has failed. The Christianizing of England has made sterner claims than Arthur's chivalry can meet.

In cursory fashion the Maimed King is healed, and the three knights spiritual are borne away as in a dream by the ship with the silver altar, above which hovers the gleaming glory of the Grail. The prayer of Galahad when he is lost in ecstasy, is that he may pass out of this world at such time as he may desire. Enough of humanity lingers in him to send a message to his father; but from that time what faint human semblance he had, disappears. In Sarras, persecution awaits him, followed by honor; he recks naught of either,—king or prisoner, all is one to him; his spiritual insight deepens till it seems new-born: "Then he began to tremble right hard when the deadly flesh began to behold the spiritual things."[1] In due time he is borne upward according to his prayer by a vision of angels,—leaving one last word of love for Lancelot. To Galahad, the pilgrim path has been one of union from the outset. Nor need the literal-minded be troubled by a seeming inconsistency, in that he had been brought up from

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvii, 22, p. 268.

infancy in the Presence of the Holy Thing that afterwards became his quest. It is true to fact and life that they who possess the light most fully from the beginning, are the same who seek it most ardently until the end. "Union" is no static passivity, but a perpetual progress. So Galahad departs from sight, slain by the exceeding radiance of that vision which he ever sees yet ever seeks. His is a marvelous figure,—yet it is hard not to love Bors a little better,—Bors, who returns to a world of sin full of strange sorrows, where fidelity affords the only clue. Here is one of the truest and holiest stories in the world, says Caxton's colophon: surely also one of the saddest.

VI

The art in the Grail-books is peculiarly full of romantic suggestion. Neither theology nor asceticism is supposed to conduce to art, and these books are full of theology and convey an ascetic ideal. Yet "True beauty dwells in deep retreats," as Wordsworth says, and such a deep retreat is offered by the Grail-story. At the first advent of the Holy Vessel, when the sunbeam entered the darkened hall on the wings of thunder, and all they were alighted of the Holy Ghost, each man saw other fairer than ever they saw before. It is a symbol, this dower of beauty bestowed by the Grail upon its knights. Through the quickening of spiritual mystery, the beauty touched with strangeness always inherent in romantic art, is shed over all the scene.

Merely from the point of view of style, Malory is at his best in this part of his work. His style is always his surest title to distinction, but it is seldom so nobly sustained and so full of lovely undertones: the rhythms, in their very simplicity, can not be forgotten. Often

the rhythmic charm has an almost liturgical effect, and indeed the prose vibrates with echoes of the rich Low Latin of Breviary or Vulgate: "Damosel," said Percivale, "I serve the best man of the world, and in his service he will not suffer me to die, for who that knocketh shall enter and who that asketh shall have, and who that seeketh him he hideth him not."[1] Especially in the last scenes, these effects are constant; the prose has a depth of tone like the Church Sequences.

In addition to the beauty of sound, with its deep call to something within not wholly understood, these books abound in beauty of pictorial detail; and such detail goes far to compensate for the tenuous and abstract nature of the central theme. The very setting suggests the adventures of the soul. The landscape, reticently treated as usual, is quite different from the ordinary landscape of romance, with its rich castles and friendly woodlands. It is wilder, stranger, it shows forest gloom and desert strands and wildernesses haunted by wild beasts. Twilights and midnights are shot through with light not of this earth. Great waters cold under the moon are ever near at hand. This is as it should be; for from the outset the Grail is associated with water; a swift river flows around its castle, or it is found at the end of a pier reaching out into the ocean, or the four streams from Paradise encircle its home. On these waters, lonely and restless though they be, many ships are sailing; the marvelous ship of Solomon, phantom-like as that in which the Ancient Mariner dreed his weird, the little barque where lies the bier of Percivale's sister, the Grail-ship, a floating Oratory, with its altar of silver and the hovering light of the Holy Vessel shining rose-red above.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xiv., 8, p. 201.

The scenes are most often in twilight or shadow, shot through with natural or supernatural light. Indeed the use of light and dark, of color, of fire, is consummate, and none the less charming to the eye for the constant symbolic suggestion, which charms the spirit too. The use of lights would be a study by itself in æsthetic effect. Silver and red are the dominant tones,—the moonlight of earth, illumined by celestial love. "And so he rode through a forest and the moon shone clear,"—the words sound almost like a refrain. An arm in red samite bears a candlestick which shines before the gaze of Gawain and Ector; six tapers light the way of the Grail through the night blackness, while Lancelot sleeps beneath the Cross. From the red marble stone whence he draws his sword, to the last detail of his array, Galahad is associated with this Eucharistic, this Pentecostal glow. His armor gleams like a star of fire as he recedes down long dim woodland ways.

For this use of red, of silver, of light and dark, derives its romantic potency from its constant hint of parable. Around all the common objects of nature hovers the suggestion of the occult and the holy. Impressive above all is the imagery from Catholic worship. When so encountered, apart from its usual setting, it affects one as might the chanting of a Cathedral choir heard suddenly in the open, above the morning chorus of the birds. The recurrent ecclesiastical symbols gain peculiar reality, seeming to be expressions not of artificial human usage, but of life on a higher plane, natural as that of wave or tree. Such is the effect of the waste Chapel in the woods, found by Lancelot in dense darkness, within which is a fair altar richly arrayed with cloth of clean silk, and alit with a great clean candlestick which bare six great candles and the candlestick

was of silver. In such a place, how be surprised when the Grail goes by? These hints of consecrate and ordered beauty are in effective contrast with the surroundings of wild free nature. The Crosses in vague forest depths or at the parting of ways,—excellent spots at which to await a vision; those other Crosses so useful to tempted knights, at hand in the hilts of swords, all help to transform this ancient earth into a shrine; nor are hints lacking of angelic "Presences plain in the place."

The central Event of Catholic worship, the Mass, is also the center and end of the Grail-Quest, and the imagination makes reverently free with it. And rightly; for the purpose of the story is to open men's eyes, that they may behold the whole world *sub specie Sacramenti*. Airs may well breathe from a land that is very far off and very near, voices speak from the leaves, and phases of celestial worship enlighten dark earthly ways. For the universe is forever singing to the opened ear its Holy, Holy, Holy; and these seeking knights catch echoes of that song through their "dull mortality." The soul of romance is always in its suggestion of what may not be fully known, and the Sangraal, "which is the Secret of Our Lord Jesus Christ," is the ultimate symbol that may well abide in the central sanctuary of romantic art.

VII

The last evidence of the romantic quality in Grail-story is the boldness of its symbolism. What contrast could be sharper than that between monk and knight, the ecstasies of contemplation and the energies of ceaseless deed? To present the ascetic armed as the warrior, contemplation under the metaphor of action,

was a feat natural to a period when violently opposed ideals existed in outward unity, while they contended below the surface for control.

To gain the full force of the method, it is helpful to hark back to the epic and heroic age preceding the ages of romance. Something in most of us vibrates still in response to the ideal presented, for instance in *Beowulf* in *The Story of the Volsungs*, or in the semi-historic chronicles of Saxo Grammaticus; but long before the age of chivalry, this ideal had been confronted by a new one. The Cross had been lifted high on the hill of the world, and the Sufferer slowly supplanted the Warrior as the central hero of humanity. Throughout the Middle Ages, Christian standards were at odds with the standards of the natural man; and the Victim and Redeemer drew to Himself an adoration such as Foeman and Avenger had never known. Throngs, subdued by the supernatural beauty of the new ideal, sought to follow it without compromise; innumerable hermits, recluses, Religious of every type, abjured abruptly the warrior ardors of their forefathers, accepted non-resistance as the truest courage and pain as the highest glory, and withdrew from a bloody world to stern self-mortification and cloistered peace. So many were there of these would-be disciples of an absolute ideal, that their figures were a commonplace, as matter-of-fact to the life and literature of the Middle Ages as shop-girl or factory-hand to ours.

But all the same the great world went on its fighting way, not much affected by them. And Christianity is never contented with drawing a number of individuals, however large, away from normal living. It can not rest, till its own vision becomes the normal one. Monks may have been willing to let the wicked world go to

destruction, but Christianity is broader than monkhood. In every period, the religion of Christ works in two ways: even while it invites men to follow its own uncompromising standard, it is busy in permeating and modifying the ideals and standards which it finds in possession. So, by the side of monasticism, chivalry arose,—blended strangely of Christianity and Paganism, softening the tenacious warrior ideal by a new tenderness, stressing mercy, instilling self-control. A perpetual contradiction inheres in the central figure of romance,—the knight, who as an old Welsh poem has it, is "gentle, lowly, meek, before he receives the endowment of the brave," yet rides out cheerfully predatory on the highway, confident that the proper thing for a gentleman to do when he meets another gentleman is to run at him with a spear and knock him down.

The ideal at this level governs the ordinary reaches of romance; with allowances for certain changes in civilization, it still holds the field to-day. Its concessions to the weakness of the flesh, combined with the elements of nobility in it, fascinate the imagination, and almost satisfy the moral sense,—but never quite. Conscience rarely succeeds in emancipating men completely from compromise, but it is always restive because it can not. Even the Middle Ages wavered in their allegiance between the chivalric ideal, and an asceticism which virtually repudiated earthly life altogether; and before abandoning themselves to either alternative, a further compromise was sought.

Grail-romance, like the historic Orders of the Templars and the Knights of St. John, represents that compromise. Christianity could not wholly substitute monk for fighter, prayer for action, as the center of attraction; men clung too strongly to their full-blooded

secular delights. But it could do more than modify the warrior ideal, it could use that ideal as a vehicle for another. Nor was there need to do much violence to religion in order to present the inner life under images of warfare. From Exodus to the Apocalypse, the Scriptures are full of such images, and it is to be feared that souls fighting spiritual foes will continue even should nations disarm, to find the metaphors of Paul more native to them than those of Jesus. So the Grail-legends arose at the call of a true psychological instinct for what men craved. The hold that they have on us, like the hold of chivalry, is due to an inconsistency open to criticism from the point of view of logic, but entirely consonant with life.

And underlying the militant symbolism of the surface, is the constant suggestion of that other image,—the Quest, the pilgrimage of the soul. It can hardly be questioned by any one familiar with mystical writing that Grail-romance is the product of minds intimate with esoteric thought. The "Sight of Soul" which is the end of desire has rarely been suggested with more power than in the words spoken by Lancelot on awaking from trance, by Galahad in the Spiritual City. The Middle Ages, singularly great in their God-consciousness, inherited a spiritual tradition handed down partly in the Sacramental system of the Church, partly in subterranean and heretical channels. Grail-romance apparently had access to both these channels and drank long and deep at their springs.

So the Ages of Faith gave their best wisdom to the Arthuriad. Beyond all pleasure in adventure, beyond loyalty to love or king, lies another reach of experience. It is blank boredom for the Gawains and the Ectors, it is not meant even for the Gareths or the Arthurs.

But for those who enter, it holds in reserve an accession of life such as no earthly passion can bestow. Institutional religion has this to do with it, that a kernel can not thrive without its shell. Incorporated with the Arthuriad, this experience added a new power to the national epic, for it lifted the *Morte Darthur* from the perfunctory though honest religion of the earlier books, to the higher region where only the saints breathe free.

The air in those regions is dangerous, and it is possible to claim that the more secular phases of the romance are the more wholesome. In some ways, the Perceval quest, which finds its goal in the healing of an afflicted king and the rule of its hero over an earthly though holy realm, would better have accorded with the original intent still discernible,—the redemption of the Land of Logres,—than does the story as we have it. Yet had we not been lifted to the plane of Galahad, the story would fail in showing at fullest intensity all the forces that govern the age. Tristram is no more the perfect lover of Iseult than is Galahad the perfect lover of God. The Middle Ages knew both types of love at their height, and romance would be impoverished by the lack of either. Meantime, so far as epic action is concerned, the elements of the drama have now been all presented, and the hour for their conflict has struck.

CHAPTER VI

REACTION

BOOKS XVIII–XIX

I

IF the Grail-Quest be taken as a story complete in itself, interest ceases when Galahad dies at Sarras. The two motifs which play through it more or less at cross-purposes are both worked out. The sanctification of the individual, through detachment from the evil world, is realized in the instances of the three elect knights; nor is there anything more to say about the sanctification of England. That has failed, and the failure throws the original scheme of the Quest awry.

Malory was not responsible for this miscarriage. He but took the legend as he found it, crystallized long before his day by the mediæval inability to picture the Kingdom of God on earth. Romance can go a good ways in enjoying and conceiving impossibilities; but such a picture was beyond its range. The chivalric compromise was conceivable enough; a Christian knighthood indulging its fighting tastes for the sake of imposing baptism on a Paynim world was a sympathetic and cheerful idea. But if religion tried to discard compromise the mind was sure to balk. Let monks stay monks. In their own place they are all

very well,—desirable members of the community, to be treated with the highest respect, since they are busy making for others as well as themselves the connection that ought to be made with the Four Last Things. But if they disguise themselves in armour and try to capture fellowship in that most jealously guarded of circles, the Table Round, they will find themselves tenderly dismissed to Sarras,—a city which may stand for the spiritual Coventry to which inconvenient idealists are still consigned. An ascetic and separatist ideal is all that the world is ever ready to concede to holiness. The Grail is withdrawn from the Land of Logres and its true disciples follow it. After that, outward and visible disaster is only a question of time. Conscience might be unable to carry to an end the splendid dream of spiritual victory in national life; but at least it saw, because it had to see, that the frustration of the Divine Will on the mystical and spiritual plane was sure sooner or later to mean tragedy down below. That tragedy occupies the remainder of the *Morte Darthur;* the overthrow of the Round Table is decided in the hushed scene in the Chamber of Carbonek, where the Saviour, even while feeding His true children with the Food of Pilgrims fulfilled of all sweetness, passes judgment on faithless England.

So the story, having buried Percevale and Galahad, returns to Camelot where Lancelot waits with good Sir Bors. The two exchange a pledge when first they meet after the Quest is done:

Then Lancelot took Sir Bors in his arms and said: Gentle cousin, ye are right welcome to me, and all that ever I may do for you and for yours ye shall find my poor body ready at all times, while the spirit is in it, and that I promise

you faithfully and never to fail. And wit ye well, gentle cousin Sir Bors, that ye and I will never depart in sunder whilst our lives may last. Sir, said he, I will as ye will.[1]

It is natural that these two should seek comfort together, and cling one to the other in a special way; for they share sacred memories. And life is sad at Camelot. Arthur's prediction is fulfilled: a scant half of the knights have come back. The brave story moves on, with no comment, toward the swift-approaching catastrophe, but it is painfully evident that chivalry is on the wane. Before Galahad came, the court got along very well and found the light of earth quite good enough for it. Now that his young presence has been there, now that the shrouded Grail has been seen, men are a little lonely, more than a little restless. Reaction from overstrain is also in full sway, and the fiercer passions are all ready to break the leash. Things usually happen like this; the lower nature never so asserts itself as in the rebound from moments of aspiration. Only very sanctified people are free from impulses of irritation or worry, on returning to the world after making a Retreat, or after Early Communion.

Nearly all the knights have been on the holy Quest. They have returned to take up the old life again with relief, but that life has lost a good deal of its savour. The light of conscience has been turned on its laxities and facile contradictions. Men will not pursue the old way any less vigorously, — they, the defeated in the Quest; but they must pursue it with more unease.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xvii., 23, p. 270.

II

People will make the best of things: and at first there is much joy in the court. The plot develops well and swiftly. One precious heritage at least remains from the Grail-books,—the human quality. Lancelot and Guenevere are no longer puppets but breathing man and woman; for Guenevere too has come alive at last. In earlier times, she was merely the queen-in-position; now she is very woman, alike in her gracious dignities toward the world without and her unreasonable petulance and jealousy toward the man she loves. Other characters too keep all the vitality they have gained, and new people emerge, sharply and clearly drawn. We are glad to be moving once more among solidities, in regions where no weird portents nor supernatural glories are to be expected, but the scene is occupied by good natural tournaments, by familiar loves and quarrels, picturesque and pleasant to any one.

Only, the weather is hotter than it used to be. The passions, unprotected by those spiritual disciplines which have profited men so little, are more violent than ever. They sweep the story on inexorably to the close. All the forces indicated at the beginning of the Arthuriad have now been brought out clearly into the light of day: earthly love, heavenly love, loyalty to Arthur. That they can not harmonize is increasingly evident. Their conflict is to break out now,—grim, desperate, to the death.

So no surprise is occasioned by the Heading of the eighteenth book: "Of the joy King Arthur and the queen had of the achieving of the Sangraal; and how Lancelot fell to his old love again." It is piteously

true to fact that he who of all sinful knights came nearest to attaining the Vision, is now the chief cause of the moral catastrophe which overwhelms the realm.

Then as the book saith Sir Lancelot began to resort unto Queen Guenevere again, and forgat the promise and the perfection that he made in the Quest. For as the book saith, had not Sir Lancelot been in his privy thoughts and in his mind so set inwardly to the queen as he was in seeming outward to God, there had no knight passed him in the quest of the Sangreal. But ever his thoughts were privily on the queen, and so they loved together more hotter than they did toforehand, and had such privy draughts together that many in the court spake of it, and in especial Sir Agravaine, Sir Gawain's brother, for he was ever open-mouthed.[1]

In spite of all this, it is a new Lancelot on whom the light now falls, a Lancelot in whom the clash of forces has at least evolved a soul. Lancelot is not to forget the Grail; he is never to forget it. And Guenevere is never to remember. There is no inward understanding between them any more.

Minds are at no point analyzed after the fashion of the modern novelist. The mediæval manner requires more alert reading than the modern if fine points are not to be missed, and deeds and words must speak for themselves. But no one following the dialogue from this time through the rest of Malory can mistake the implications. Lancelot's attitude to Guenevere from now on is rather a desperate and constrained loyalty than passion reborn. Or, at least, the elements in it are mixed. Doubtless the old fascination resumes its sway,—yet the chant of Grail-worship is in his ears,

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xviii., 1, p. 271.

and spiritual experience has quickened his remorse for his sin against the king he honours. In Lancelot, religious and political loyalty are at one, and the third passion is their common enemy. Even while taking those "deep privy draughts" of guilty love, he seeks in every way the avoidance of evil appearances; not from crafty self-consciousness but from true regard for the honour of the court; and one feels that if Guenevere would permit, self-restraint in more than seeming might be his desire.

The Queen however has grown restless. No explanation is given of the fierce unreasonableness that possesses her; but it is easy to understand. From the time when he came to court as a young squire Lancelot had been all her own. His will had received its every vibration from hers, as if that alone gave him life and impelled him to action. All this is so no longer. She is forced to share him with something which even in the privacy of her heart she can not condemn, but which is none the less alien and hateful to her. From the moment when Galahad came to court and Guenevere gazed on him and turned away, prepared haughtily to defend him against all criticism from others yet tortured by the look of him, her inner turmoil has deepened. Lancelot has gone on quest, Lancelot has returned. Elaine is dead; Guenevere has no earthly rival. But though he is still her knight and her servant, there is that in his consciousness which she can not probe. Wretched, bewildered, her suspicions are constantly acute. Her exactions increase; they are the measure of her misery.

In this state of things, quarrel between the lovers is inevitable. It opens the book,—dramatic, highly toned. Lancelot has found his tongue, and right nobly

he speaks, imploring, all but rebuking, calling to mind with wistful desire for her sympathy, the high nature of the Quest from which he is so lately returned; then, when such appeal fails, speaking practically and plainly, as a man of the world to whom her reputation is dear and who sees it jeopardized by her recklessness every hour. It is the great gentleman who speaks, even if it be the sinner too; Lancelot's sensitive recoil from scandal, his cherishing of all life's reticences and dignities, breathe in his every word.

But Guenevere is past caring for scandal. Her self-control is lost; the queen has vanished in the woman. Her reply is to break out into passionate weeping, into a torrent of foolish and jealous accusation. Branding Lancelot as a false knight and a common lecher, she exiles him from court. Sorrowful, obedient, he departs at her bidding, to the disgust of Bors and his other friends. And here is the beginning of troubles.

For his departure only increases the murmurs of suspicion abroad. Rancour abounds, evil speaking poisons the air. Guenevere, becoming politic a little late in the day, chooses to give a fateful dinner. It is planned to honour Gawain and his kin,—"and all was for to show outward that she had as great joy in all other knights of the Table Round as she had in Sir Lancelot."[1]

Incidentally, the dinner serves as a roll-call of the greater knights returned from the Quest. The House of Gawain and the House of Lancelot are there in force,—also Palomides and Safere, La Cote Mal Taillé, Sir Persant, and Sir Ironsides whom Gareth had overcome and brought to court, and several others. Also, there is one Sir Pinel le Savage, cousin to Sir Lamorak of Gales. And now that ancient feud, so

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xviii., 3, p. 274.

carefully kept before the mind through the preceding reaches of the story, enters the main plot—the feud between the House of Lot and Gawain and the House of Pellinore and Lamorak. For Sir Pinel does not forget the death of Lamorak, so bitterly lamented, subject of such dark rumours; to say nothing of the death long ago of King Pellinore his uncle. He seeks to kill Gawain with a poisoned apple. But another knight, not Gawain, eats the apple, and falls dead at the Feast,—a sinister scene powerfully presented. And suspicion lights on Guenevere who had made that feast: and they all turn on her with loud accusation, above all one Mador de la Porte whose knight-vassal had been the one to die. So there openly Sir Mador appealed the Queen of the death of his cousin; Arthur, right kingly, shows that respect for law fundamental in feudalism, the only earnest perhaps that it held of a future democracy. He makes neither evasion nor excuse, and after the fashion of the day it is appointed that Guenevere must meet the ordeal of fire like any other woman, and be burnt unless some knight appear as her champion.

So tragedy breaks out of a sudden: and Malory is at his most stern and swift in narrating it. The violence of manners, the all but brutal coarseness, so strangely blended with the elevation and the fine-spun delicacies of chivalry, are brought home with a shock. And the true situation in the realm of Logres appears as by flash-light; for Guenevere can not find any one to espouse her quarrel. Arthur is loved, but she is not loved, and all men apparently give easy and instant credence to the accusation which makes her what she certainly was not,—a destroyer of good knights. Arthur in a fine touch is annoyed that the greatest

of his knights, the one on whom he can always depend in emergency, should be absent from the court: "What aileth you," says he, "ye can not keep Sir Lancelot upon your side?"[1] At last, not for her sake, but because Arthur begs him for the love of Lancelot, Bors undertakes the fight: not without some plain talking to Guenevere, who has to fall on her knees to entreat him.

Of course, Lancelot rescues her at the last moment, when the solemn assembly is called and the faggots are ready and the queen stands helpless in the constable's ward. It is a picturesque passage, formal and serious in tone, reflecting with some accuracy the real code that obtained during at least some part of the feudal period. Danger is passed for the moment, and our old friend Nimue,—Merlin's Nimue, wife to Pelleas,—clears up the matter of the poisoning: not sorry perhaps to show how well Gawain is hated. Nevertheless, the glory of the court can never shine unclouded again, nor can Guenevere ever regain her full queenly dignity. Malory has jealously guarded that dignity up to this point. It is much less in evidence in his sources. The impeachment of the Queen would bring no special shock after the story in the early romances of the false Guenevere who once drove the true queen into exile in the Sorlois, where she lived for some time discredited under the protection of Galahad le Haut Prince. The art with which Malory suppressed that story is evident. The Queen has held her throne beside Arthur in unchallenged honour: now, when preparation is to be made for the final tragedy, this episode of the alleged poisoning comes in with admirable force. Although she is proved innocent, men are not

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xviii., 4, p. 276.

going to forget that she may sin and need defense like any other mortal woman.

During these final books, Guenevere is threatened three times with trial, and the gradation in tragic interest is marked with excellent skill. This first time, she is wholly guiltless: on the next occasion, to be narrated in Book XIX., she is guiltless on the precise indictment, but not guiltless in the sight of God. The third is the tragic dénouement, when she stands in her smock, sentenced to death, her guilt real, and evident to all men. From now on, the air is ominous in Camelot.

III

Meanwhile, a little pause is made before the great storm breaks, for the refreshment of an idyll. Malory is past master in the fine art of retards, and nowhere is a better instance of their effectiveness. The story of the Lily Maid of Astolat, which occupies the rest of this book, is an interlude and a transition. It secures a descent not too abrupt from the high levels of the Grail-books to the heated plains where the last struggle is waged; and here is the place for it, immediately after a brief strong exposition of the precarious and threatening situation at the court.

There is no touch of mysticism in this story, yet neither is there any touch of evil. It shows Lancelot in a wholly amiable light, and reveals more fully than before the delicacy and fidelity of his nature. He appears worn and sorrowful, yet perfect in gentleness, courtesy, and honour,—just the person to capture the affection of an honest maid. As for Elaine, she is a real mediæval girl,—amazingly frank, as the habit of

mediæval women seems to have been, but never unmaidenly, making no pretence to holiness—(what would Percivale's sister have made of her?)—not at all a diaphanous young person, but red-blooded as she is innocent: a girl of vitality and spirit, who dies for Lancelot with a kind of wholesome energy. The pathos of her death is direct and simple; she is no Clarissa Harlowe, dying to slow music while she languidly designs her tombstone. Elaine dies swiftly and energetically as she has lived. Since Lancelot will have none of her, there is nothing else for her to do; there is no thought of shame in her and little of self-pity. Her heart is on Lancelot to the end: in vain does her ghostly father bid her take it away: "Why should I leave such thoughts?" said Elaine: "Am I not an earthly woman?"[1]

The pathos of her floating down to Camelot is in the situation itself, not in any sentimentalizing over it. But there are few scenes in romance more dramatic than that where the barge bearing her dead body drifts under the palace windows, on the stream which has seen Galahad's marble stone, and other marvels in its day. Arthur and Guenevere discover the barge, and Elaine's letter is read in their presence: a succinct masterpiece, much finer than in the stanzaic *Morte:* it is here addressed to Lancelot:

> Most noble knight, Sir Lancelot, now hath death made us two at debate for your love. I was your lover, that men called the fair maiden of Astolat: therefore unto all ladies I make my moan, yet pray for my soul, and bury me at least, and offer ye my mass-penny: this is my last request, and a clene maiden I died, I take God to witness: pray

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xviii., 19, p. 303.

for my soul, Sir Lancelot, as thou art peerless. This was all the substance in the letter.[1]

Lancelot is sent for; and the talk between him and the remorseful queen, ashamed of the wild suspicions that have consumed her concerning his relations with this maiden, is superb. It is carried on in the presence of Arthur, and every phrase is charged with suppressed meanings. The unconscious words of the king, the bitter restraint of the queen, the weary forbearance and the dignity of Lancelot, with its hint of rebuke toward his trying lady, might be transferred to the stage without change. "For, madam, said Lancelot, I love not to be constrained to love, for love must arise of the heart and not by no constraint. That is truth, said the king, and many knight's love is free in himself and never will be bounden, for where he is bounden he looseth himself. Then said the king unto Sir Lancelot, It will be your worship that ye oversee that she be interred worshipfully."[2]

So passes the Lily Maid. And now, while minds are still sufficiently free, there shall be one more good old-fashioned tournament, where knights may hack and hew at each other gleefully and friendly, with no *arrière pensée*. Palomides and many other good comrades shall pass across the scene, and occasion shall be taken,—occasion needed, as the sequel will make plain,—to recall the old fellowship between Lancelot and Gareth, a fellowship over which time has cast no shadow. Lancelot never loses a chance to praise his friend: "By my head, said Sir Lancelot, he is a noble knight, and a mighty man and well breathed . . . and he

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xviii., 20, p. 305.
[2] *Ibid.*, xviii., 20, p. 306.

is a gentle knight, courteous, true, and bounteous, meek and mild, and in him is no manner of malengine but plain, faithful, and true."[1] Generous and ample language, befitting the praiser and the praised! As for Gareth, his feeling for Lancelot is but little this side idolatry. Now in the tournament, where Lancelot is fighting disguised against Arthur and his party, Gareth deserts his own kin and comes to his friend's aid: not even in play can he bear to be against him: "For no man shall never make him be against Sir Lancelot, by cause he made him knight," says Gawain to Arthur. And Arthur, having at first blamed him gently, gives his approval right royally when all is over: "Truly ye say well, and worshipfully have ye done, . . . and all the days of my life . . . wit you well I shall love you and trust you the more better."[2]

So ends the pleasant Tournament of the Diamond, and the book closes with a little chapter, Malory's own, one of the quaintest and most delightfully cadenced bits of mediæval prose, telling how there arrived in the court the lusty month of May, that giveth to all lovers courage, and how true love is likened to summer:

> Therefore like as May month flowereth and flourisheth in many gardens, so in likewise let every man of worship flourish his heart in this world first unto God, and next unto the joy of them that he promised his faith unto; for there was never worshipful man nor worshipful woman but they loved one better than another, and worship in arms may never be foiled, but first reserve the honour to God, and secondly the quarrel must come of thy lady; and such love I call virtuous love.[3]

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xviii., 18, p. 301.
[2] *Ibid.*, xviii., 24, p. 313.
[3] *Ibid.*, xviii., 25, p. 314.

Though tragic times are on the way, none the less shall we stand to it how that true love is good; and here shall be made that little mention of Queen Guenevere; let it be held in mind through all woes to befall through her that at least "while she lived she was a true lover, and therefore she had a good end."[1]

IV

In this "lusty month" shall be presented a pretty Pageant of the Spring; it opens Book XIX. Outwardly, the mediæval world is as brave and gay as ever, and its tastes have not changed. Tristram and Iseult would have liked to be with Guenevere, as she rides forth into the forest Maying, with her ten knights and their retinues well mounted, clothed all in green silk or cloth; and as they bedash them with herbs, flowers, and mosses in the best manner and freshest, it would seem as if the May-tide of chivalry had returned. It is pleasant to hear the names of old friends,—Sir Kay le Seneschal, Sir Sagramour le Desirous, Sir Ozanna le Cure Hardi, Sir Pelleas the Lover, and others whose stories have been told in their day; pleasant also to hear of that goodly company of young Queen's Knights with their white shields, who figure in the *Merlin* romance. The spirit of the company as it rides on, Maying in woods and meadows as it pleases them, is of the merriest. Yet these charming effects are only momentary, like Spring sunshine swiftly darkened by storm. As the book proceeds, we are soon forced to wonder whether chivalry is more than skin deep after all.

The first part of the book is the part that shocks the reader. It tells the unpleasant old story of the

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xviii., 25, p. 315.

Rape of Guenevere, here caught as she rides on her Maying by Meliagrance, weak and vicious son of the good old King Bagdemagus. Meliagrance has already appeared in the Books of the Lovers riding with Lamorak and insolently sighing after Guenevere. Now, his behaviour illustrates the worst features in that sensuous license always in those books ready at a touch to break through artificial restraints. The painful impression of the incident is needed just here. The gayety of May, the refined etiquette of *L'amour Courtois* are as fascinating as ever; the book has just been praising them in its most lyric manner. But their tenuous graces can be brushed aside like gossamer at any moment. Glamour is over: it is time that the world show itself in the harsh colors of reality. Perhaps Malory himself did not enjoy this story very much. At all events, he treated it in his most succinct manner, in sharp contrast to the great length accorded the episode in his source.

This is Chrétien's[1] story, *The Knight of the Cart*, in which Lancelot first enters romance; but Malory handles it in an entirely different fashion, reverting in a way to a more primitive use of the motif. That motif is one of the most ancient in the Arthuriad. Welsh triads allude to the bearing away of Arthur's queen by a dark man of the shadows; it has been suggested that Meliagrance may be own cousin to Dis and Guenevere to Persephone. Malory's handling suggests, as does his handling of the Gawain-figure, a tendency of the primitive *fonds* to assert itself even

[1] The story is also told in the Latin *Life of Gildas*, preserved in a twelfth-century manuscript. "Melwas," the "wicked king of the Summer Country," or Somerset, here carries Guenevere away to Glastonbury.

in the latest phases of romance. Malory's version is frankly and abruptly coarse and almost barbarous, where Chrétien's is demure, formal, and a mirror of the proprieties of the age. Nowhere else in the *Morte* is the picture of civilization so gross, nowhere are manners so shocking.

The story would better befit the dark days of the Völkerwanderung than the courtly times of Arthur. And yet, Malory's version is in many points an obviously late redaction. The central feature of the twelfth-century poem had been rather far-fetched and absurd; it was the hero's sacrifice of dignity in riding in a cart to rescue his lady. Times and tastes have changed, and by the fifteenth century this exploit has become a trifle flat. Very little is made of it. Guenevere has learned common sense since the days when she refused her champion the favor of her countenance because he had hesitated an instant before getting into that cart; here she rates soundly a lady who jests at his appearance, and tells her that her jest is foul-mouthed. The relations between herself and Lancelot are a little tense and bitter, and unfair words pass between them, enhancing the impression of strain. But this is part of the general development through this part of the *Morte*, and has nothing to do with Lancelot's behavior on this special occasion.

The craven Meliagrance, abashed by the mere advent of Lancelot, yields his claims instantly and tamely, offering to restore the queen on the morrow; and the episode would have no point at all were it not for the sequel. Guenevere, who bears herself well in a solicitude for her wounded knights which leads her to care for them in her own chamber, can as usual not restrain her passion. She encourages Lancelot to

break his way and hurt his hands to come to her; is naturally, though stupidly, accused by Meliagrance of misbehavior with one of the knights she has tended, and is exposed to the Ordeal by Fire.

The accusation is false, but the reader knows and all men except Arthur know that she is none the less a guilty woman. This is the second ordeal of Guenevere. In the first, she had carried our full sympathy; here she is verbally but in no other way guiltless of the sin laid to her charge. A third time is to come.

The effect of the episode is enhanced by the fact that it does not happen in some far outlying district, like Cornwall, but near the center of Arthur's domain. It would seem as if Guenevere might ride out in safety close to her own palace. But the castle of Meliagrance is only five miles from Westminster. The local notes are frequent at just this point; Lancelot when called to the queen's help "took the water at Westminster Bridge, and made his horse to swim over Thames unto Lambeth."[1] It is presumably in the fields of London that she stands by the pyre waiting to see if a champion shall appear.

Lancelot of course rescues her again, in spite of his detention by a mean trick in the prison of Meliagrance, whence he is released by another frank and lovesick damsel at the price of a kiss. Meliagrance, who is a much less careful and interesting study than in either the prose *Lancelot* or Chrétien's poem, is comfortably slain,—Guenevere taking satisfaction in the fact. He well deserved his fate. But foul suspicions are now muttered louder and louder on every hand. A sense of discouragement and futility is abroad. In a world where Meliagrance can suddenly take possession of

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xix., 4, p. 320.

Guenevere by brute force close to the king's central city, where life can drop instantly, with no warning, to the level of disgraceful horrors, what has been gained by all the efforts of the Table Round? The Grail-Quest proved unavailing; it now appears that all the chivalric code, so zealously adopted, so earnestly sworn, has been helpless to check the crudest passions. Does the beast in men conquer after all? Disgust threatens; nothing is left to look for unless it be some mighty purification of life by pity and terror. And the moment for this draws near.

V

But first another of those retards in which Malory excels. As in the preceding book the opening of the tragic action was contrasted with the human pathos of the Maid of Astolat, so here the painful episode of the Rape of Guenevere with its thickening gloom is followed by an episode bathed in tranquil beauty. This is the Healing of the Wounds of Sir Urre.

The season is again near the Feast of the Spirit, and a sick knight, whose seven great wounds can be healed only when the best knight in the world shall search them, is borne before the assembled court, accompanied by his mother and sister, the last a full fair damsel named Felelolie. The phrase "best knight" is evidently used here in a religious, not a worldly sense. If Lancelot is the destined healer, it is because of the power of faith that is in him. He, the cynosure of chivalry, is before long to stand exposed to the common gaze as the betrayer of his king, the murderer of the innocent, the slave to fleshly lusts. Nothing shall be spared him by the stern old story.

But first, we are to see into his very soul, and to discern there latent qualities of humility, of holiness, of prayerful tenderness, that make him strong to heal and to restore. Never elsewhere does he appear to such advantage; never perhaps, not even in the Quest of the Grail, is his inward life so clearly revealed.

There is a liturgical solemnity about this brief Pageant of Sir Urre. First Arthur, then all the kings, dukes, and earls that be there present essay to search the wounds; but though they "softly handle him" it may not be that he be made whole. Then come King Uriens of the land of Gorre, King Anguish of Ireland, King Carados of Scotland, all associated long with Arthur. Political worthies otherwise unknown follow: then comes Sir Gawain, being of royal blood; and his three sons and his brethren, including Sir Gareth, the good knight that was of very knighthood worth all the brethren, all essay in vain. Even Bors may not achieve this marvel. The other knights follow in stately line, the enumeration of their names covering four pages. To the ordinary reader these pages are a mere list to be skipped; to the intimates of Arthur's fellowship they are full of delightful suggestions. For here is the last roll-call of the great Order before its fall,—marshalled in state, bent on a deed to which the purest spirit of their vows must summon. Forty knights, it is told, are away; many have perished, some miserably as Sir Lamorak, others gloriously as Galahad. Yet how moving the associations roused by the names of those who are left!

Malory himself has told the tale of a great many. Sir Kay, Sir Dinadan, Sir Lionel, Sir Ector and Sir Bors, Sir Hebes le Renommé, Sir La Cote Mal Taillé, Sir Uwain les Avoutres, Sir Ozanna le Cure Hardi,

Sir Tor, Sir Epinogris, Sir Pelleas, Sir Mador de la Porte, Sir Colgrevaunce, Sir Ironside, and various others, —many of these have had their separate Pageants long or short, all have passed familiarly in and out of the story, boldly delineated with a simple touch, always acting in character, till they have become no mere shades but flesh and blood companions. It must be confessed that Malory, probably taking his source as he found it, is rather careless about his roll-call, for some of these knights have departed this life long before Urre came to court. Sir Colgrevaunce for instance had been slain by Lionel as he sought to defend Bors, and Sir Uwaine had been killed by Gawain in the Grail-Quest. Other greater names of the past, whose deaths are less easily forgotten, receive a mention: the version of Tristram's death differs slightly from that in Book X., and Lamorak is coupled with him as treacherously slain; rumor this time rising into the bold statement that he was slain by Gawain and his brethren. Sir Alisaunder le Orphelin, whose graceful love-story with Alice La Beale Pilgrim was told in Book X., is here represented by his son. Despite slight lapses, this is a real review of the epic in all its wealth of incident and personality.

It is more than this, it comes near to being a review of all romance. For here is many a knight not even alluded to elsewhere in Malory, well known in other romances. That most attractive person in the prose *Lancelot*, Lancelot's early friend Duke Galahad le Haut Prince is one of them, though by all rights he should have died long before, through devotion to his friend. Malory, who never pays any attention to this Galahad's story, merely mentions him as an important figure. Here also, incidentally mentioned, is the

Constantine who is to be Arthur's successor; here is Meliot of Logres, an interesting character in *Perceval le Gallois*, and Sir Bohort, who was King Arthur's quite undistinguished son. Sons of Gawain are here too; and Sir Marrok the good knight, that was betrayed by his wife, for she made him seven years a werewolf. Sir Marrok is a suggestive figure whose story, told by Marie de France, happens to be extant; Sir Servause on the other hand is unknown, and Malory whets curiosity by a brief hint at a peculiarity of his: "For the French book saith that Sir Servause had never courage nor lust to do battle against no man, but if it were against giants and against dragons and wild beasts."[1]

The mere etymology of the nomenclature is significant. French of course predominates; but good English names occur also like Sir Edward and Sir Ironside, and names oddly combining the two, like Sir Harry le Fise Lake; Celtic names like Sir Fergus and Sir Cardok, Latin names like Sir Lucan, names defined by possession or origin like Sir Galleron of Norway and Sir Pettipause of Winchelsea, and others defined by picturesque attributes like Le Cure Hardi and La Cote Mal Taillé, or Sir Selises of the Dolorous Tower. To enumerate the names is to gain a new sense of the depth in origin and the breadth in development possessed by romance.

All these hundred and ten knights search the wounds of Sir Urre, but in vain. Lancelot is absent: Arthur as usual yearns for him. He returns, and the heart of Urre's sister and of Urre himself presage healing. But Lancelot shrinks from the task and from the command that Arthur lays on him: "Jesu defend me,"

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xix., 11, p. 334.

said Sir Lancelot, "when so many kings and knights have essayed and failed that I should presume upon me to achieve that all ye, my lords, might not achieve. . . . Jesu defend me from that shame." "Ye take it wrong," said King Arthur, "ye shall not do it for no presumption, but for to bear us fellowship, insomuch ye be a fellow of the Table Round."[1] There is here no affected modesty on Lancelot's part, but such inward consciousness of unworthiness as may be only too easily understood. Even when Arthur commands him in the name of the honor of the Round Table, he still hesitates, and he finally relents, in words too beautiful to remain unquoted, only when Urre himself sits up weakly and entreats him:

> Ah my fair lord, said Sir Lancelot, Jesu would that I might help you; I shame me sore that I should be thus rebuked, for never was I able in worthiness to do so high a thing. Then Sir Lancelot kneeled down by the wounded knight, saying, My Lord Arthur I must do your commandment, the which is sore against my heart. And then he held up his hands and looked into the East, saying secretly unto himself, Thou blessed Father Son and Holy Ghost, I beseech thee of thy mercy that my simple worship and honesty be saved, and Thou blessed Trinity, Thou mayst give power to heal this sick knight by thy great virtue and grace of Thee, but good Lord, never of myself.[2]

The last phrase reveals the very soul of the man who in the Grail-Quest had passed all men living save Galahad had it not been for his privy sin; and his true prayer is answered. Devoutly kneeling, he searches the wounds with slow ritual solemnity, and they heal

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xix.. 12, p. 336.
[2] *Ibid.*, xix., 12, p. 337.

fair. The king and all his knights kneel down rejoicing, with acts of thanks and love; and priests and clerks arrayed in devoutest manner bring Sir Urre within Carlisle in a sort of religious ceremonial. The court for the moment is purged with real religious exaltation. But as for the healer,—"ever Sir Lancelot wept as he had been a child that had been beaten"[1]; tears that may well be remembered in the dreadful days to come.

So, for a brief last moment, all is joy. Lavaine, a sympathetic minor character, brother to the dead Elaine, is wedded to Urre's sister Felelolie,—the matches of the minor characters are often arranged by Malory with delicate feeling: and Lavaine and Urre, good knights and true, will never leave Lancelot's side in the future; for, sinner though he be, the men of finest temper cleave to him always. Thus live they in the court in noblesse and great joy; and Malory leaves here of this tale.

All is now prepared for the tragic climax of the *Morte Darthur*. Agravaine is waiting to put Lancelot and Guenevere to shame. The action of late has been speeded up; all the events of Book XIX. have apparently taken place within one month for "a great anger and unhap that stinted not till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed and slain," fell as irony would have it in the month of May, when man and woman rejoice, and "gladden of summer coming with his fresh flowers."[2]

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xix., 12, p. 337.

[2] *Ibid.*, xx., 1, p. 339.

CHAPTER VII

THE CATASTROPHE

BOOKS XX–XXI

I

TWO short books suffice for the breaking of the slow-gathered storm and its clearing in a sad sunset. Malory's leisurely ways, in some preceding parts of the work, notably in the Tristram books, taxed reasonable patience. Now he changes his methods, proceeds with concise directness, and as a result romance in these last books rises nearly if not quite to epic levels. Attention, no longer diverted by episode or secondary pageant, is focused on a few great actors; they stand out in the open, their gestures full of force and life, their words charged with energy.

These personages are Guenevere, Arthur, Lancelot, and Gawain. Minor knights like the evil Agravaine and Mordred, and the loved Gareth and Gaheris, play their destined rôles; others, like Bors and Ector, continue to act in character and to command interest. But the significant group of the four principals holds the center of the stage.

In one sense, Gawain takes the lead among them. It is not he who brings about the great disclosure of Lancelot's guilt, feared and expected so long, but it is

he who when this disclosure is once made, becomes the tenacious force of retaliation. Gawain's portrait, drawn with great care in the early books, has been developed at intervals with an elaboration which might well indicate the important and leading part for which he has been held in reserve. Up to this time, his share in the plot has not justified either his official prominence or the detail with which he has been presented. But now his time has come, and with decisive strokes he is brought into the immediate foreground.

Gawain, like Tristram and Galahad, has his one controlling passion: it is fealty to his family and his king. Tristram and Galahad have had their day and are dead, though the passions that they represented live in unceasing war within the rueful heart of Lancelot. There is material enough for tragedy in the conflict between religion and lawless love, which has gradually been brought out in almost its full force; yet a third strand in Malory's web is no less necessary to his complete design. This is political loyalty as it may be called,—the basic force that built up feudal Europe, the tie of fidelity to one's blood and to one's overlord. Offense against this loyalty is treason *par excellence*,—treason, the worst sin of which the Middle Ages were cognizant; from which all other sins took their colour. Through this offense, all the tragic elements in the *Morte Darthur* are precipitated and the outward catastrophe is forced on the realm. Had Guenevere been the wife of any one but Arthur, her *amours* might have passed unchallenged despite the grumbling of holy hermits, and Agravaine's hatred would have had no handle to grasp. But Lancelot has betrayed his king; he has broken his sacred vow to "flee treason," at a crucial point; and the avenging loyalty of

Gawain forces the issue almost against the king's will.

In order that Gawain may represent this single devotion, he is allowed no other interests. In treating the character, Malory, to use his own pleasant word, has "overskipped" the whole mediæval tradition, and no trace remains of the Gawain who was the idol of fourteenth-century England, who resisted the blandishments of the Green Knight's lady, put his head in jeopardy to redeem his word, and achieved an Adventure reserved for the devout and pure. Malory's Gawain is focused on one point and one only; no cross-currents are permitted to interfere with the fierce simplicity of his faithfulness to family and to king. The two are one with him, for Arthur is not only his sovereign but his uncle, and vehement devotion to his House blends with devotion to the throne.

Strong light has been thrown from the first on the *gens* of Gawain, a family hailing from Scotland, as Lancelot hails from France and Tristram from Cornwall. The hereditary feud between this House and that of Pellinore is stressed through all the earlier portions of the tale. More than one crime has sprung from it, and like a black thread in the weave it has given distinctive accent to the gold and crimson of the story. This turbulent clan, with the ethics of the vendetta, probably resembles real feudal nobility more than do Lancelot, Galahad, or even Tristram. Revenge, Bacon's "wild justice," is the only form of justice they recognize. The effort of Christian chivalry to transform the law of vengeance into the law of mercy, is a chief theme of the Arthuriad; it is not an effort in which the House of Gawain can be expected to offer help.

Yet Gawain by no means yields to his lower impulses without a struggle. Malory's portrait of him has been charged with inconsistency, ascribed to varying treatment in the romances from which he drew: the *Tristram* and the *Quest* viewing Gawain in a more unfavorable light than the *Lancelot* proper or the *Morte Darthur*. But the truth seems rather to be that good and bad are mingled in him from the beginning. The Gawain who cut off a lady's head in Book III., and repented bitterly, is the same Gawain who is scored as "vengeful" in Book VII., who kills Lamorak (traitorously if Lancelot speaks true) in the Tristram books, and is a "destroyer of good knights" in the Grail-books; while yet all the time he is justly lauded for his courteous bearing in ladies' service, his devotion to his comrades, and, above all, his unswerving loyalty where once his allegiance has been given. Malory's Gawain takes his vows seriously, and means to fulfill them as a true Companion of the Table Round should do. All through the book his proud wild spirit is under discipline. If the pagan side of him proves conqueror at the end, the fault is largely Lancelot's, for through Lancelot's sin, the vindictive passion held in the Christian leash is released in the seeming cause of justice and order.

Gawain's portrait, next to Lancelot's, is the best example of the way in which romance-motifs, when they seem most jejune with age, are capable of attaining new vitality, though perhaps by swerving quite away from the original idea. Whatever rich layers of tradition Malory may have ignored, however diverse and contradictory the conceptions in his sources, his resultant treatment has triumphed; for it has created a living man. Sir Gawain, "the gay, the good,

the gracious," is lost to sight in this sardonic rendering; Gawain the possible solar hero belongs to a forgotten age; but a real person takes their place, taking a definite and natural part both in the resolution of the plot and in the elucidation of the theme.

II

Gawain has no desire to precipitate the tragedy. His better impulse of magnanimity and self-control is no mere veneer. Even if it has not reached the secret springs, it has penetrated deep, transforming much in his character, softening more. He has small reason to love Lancelot, the French knight from overseas who has ousted him from the preëminent position which would seem his almost by official right. Yet if he does not show toward the court favorite the adoring devotion of his younger brother Gareth, at least he never criticizes his rival, and even expresses enthusiastic admiration for him. Nor would Gawain ever have revealed the open secret of Lancelot's relations with the queen. That is left for worse men to do,—for Agravaine the violent and Mordred the vicious.

These evil men insist on forcing the sin of Lancelot and the queen to the knowledge of the rather willfully blind king, and Gawain, aided by Gareth and Gaheris, does his best to prevent them. The balance of sympathy for Lancelot is artfully preserved by the fact that these bad knights denounce him: the situation is as true to life and as dramatically satisfying as it is confusing to the moral sense. The sin is patent; but it is Lancelot the sinner who maintains the honour of Arthur, holds the allegiance of the best people in the

court, and illustrates point by point the hard-won chivalric ideal, as no one else begins to.

The shrinking of Gawain is finely presented. He throws his whole force on what he sees as the nobler side:

> Brother Sir Agravaine I pray you and charge you move no such matters, no more afore me for wit you well, said Sir Gawain I will not be of your counsel . . . . Also . . . ye must remember how ofttimes Sir Lancelot hath rescued the king and the queen, and the best of us all had been full cold at the heart-root had not Sir Lancelot been better than we. . . . And as for my part, . . . I will never be against Sir Lancelot for one day's deed, when he rescued me from King Carados of the Dolorous Tower.[1]

Gareth and Gaheris join in the generous protest. To no avail. The bad brothers, actuated by no solicitude for virtue, but by sheer jealousy and foul-mindedness, accuse Lancelot to the king. Arthur is not particularly grateful; nor is he surprised. "The king had a deeming," says Malory drily. Deeming, indeed! He could hardly help it! Arthur, as revealed at the crisis, is also a very human figure. His pride and affection center in his knights; there is scant hint of any feeling in his official attitude toward his queen, and the sin of the lovers, while not condoned, is thus again given a certain excuse.

Having no option, the king consents to a public exposure, and it is carried out. Omens and dreadful dreams mark the night; the atmosphere recalls that of the hour when one king Duncan was murdered by his thane Macbeth. In a powerful scene, Lancelot, surprised in the queen's chamber, bids farewell to Guenevere, who at the approach of real danger finds

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 1, p. 340.

new dignity and self-forgetfulness. He defends himself single-handed and unarmed against fourteen Scottish knights,—all from the house or following of Gawain,—and all, save Mordred, are slain. Agravaine and two sons of Gawain are among the number. Mordred flees to Arthur with the news, and the way in which the king receives it speaks volumes. His chief sentiments are regret that the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken forever, and admiration for Lancelot! "Jesu mercy, said the king, he is a marvelous knight of prowess."[1] Wholly the just ruler, however, he ordains that the queen shall "have the law" and suffer death; for in those days, explains Malory, the law is such that if persons are found guilty of treason there shall be no remedy but death.

Gawain, protesting against this inevitable justice, touches a high point of magnanimity. He pleads for delay, and earnestly presents lame excuses for the guilty lovers. Even his uncle is amazed, and reminds him how Lancelot has but just slain his brother and his two sons. But Gawain, answering that they brought their deaths on themselves, still begs for mercy; and when the king bids him prepare to bring the queen to the stake, he flatly refuses obedience, saying that his heart will never serve him to this end. His refusal is the highest moral point he ever reaches: it is the consummation of that long process of discipline which he has undergone.

A compromise is struck; Gareth and Gaheris shall attend the queen; for as is learnt with surprise "they are young, and full unable to say you nay." But they insist on attending in civilian dress, without armor, as a protest against the proceedings. "Alas," says

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 7, p. 349.

Gawain, "that ever I should endure to see this woeful day!"[1] and he withdraws into his chamber, weeping heartily. Now comes the tragic climax of the *Morte Darthur:* the situation prepared by all possible use of suspense, of dread, of rhythmic reiteration. For the third time, Guenevere is "brought to the fire to be brent"; and this time, no evasion is possible. Her death is righteous.

Lancelot in the meanwhile has betaken him to his own people; and Bors their leader holds to him loyally, as does many another noble knight. It is worth noting that Bors, who has had his old distresses in the necessity of choosing between duties, now speaks without wavering. Since the evil is done, the way is plain. It is Lancelot's part now to rescue the queen, who is in jeopardy of her life through him, and to bear her away to safety.

Despoiled of all save her smock, shriven from her misdeeds, Guenevere stands at the stake and the knights keep grim guard around her. But from delicacy the greater part of them are unarmed. It is a judicial occasion, solemn as the mediæval mind could conceive. Into the press rides Lancelot full-armed, and in the rushing and turmoil, as he forces his way through the clustered men in their long robes, it mishaps him to slay many of his old and true comrades. So die Sir Tor, Sir Aglovale, Sir Pertilope, and Sir Perimones; and so, woe worth the day, die Gaheris and Gareth.

It is the crucial point of the tragedy. For Lancelot made Gareth knight, and Gareth has clung to him as ardently as have Bors and Ector, while Lancelot has lavished genial affection on him in return. Of all the secular knights, Gareth has been the most lovable.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 8, p. 351.

His story was chosen by Malory to present the chivalric ideal in its first bright perfection; since it was completed he has held his place in the background, waiting the moment when he should make his contribution to the great outworking of the plot. That moment is here. Lancelot, who so rejoices in giving the advantage to younger and weaker knights, Lancelot, who is so perfect in courtesy and gentle self-control, Lancelot the loyal and tender-hearted, is the murderer of this splendid younger comrade. Not in fair fight, but in a *mêlée* where Lancelot alone is armed, he strikes down and kills the defenseless Gareth and Gaheris his brother.

For this he is never to forgive himself, and Gawain is never to forgive him. In bitter triumph, knowing that there can never again be peace between himself and his old friends, Lancelot bears Guenevere away to Joyous Garde, where happier days had welcomed Tristram and Iseult as his guests. And the old instinct of revenge, which has ever beset Gawain, now oversweeps him in a tidal wave.

At first, he will not believe the rumor of his brothers' death, which Arthur has kept from him as long as possible. Arthur too is grieving, and characteristically: "And therefore wit you well my heart was never so heavy as it is now, and much more I am sorrier for my good knights' loss than for the loss of my fair queen, for queens I might have enow, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company."[1] And Arthur mourns for Lancelot as much as for those knights Lancelot has slain. Not so with Gawain; his sorrow turns to a single bitterness. There is a tender scene between him and his uncle when the dreadful fact comes out: he runs to the king

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 9, p. 353.

like a child, crying and weeping, "Oh King Arthur, mine uncle, my good brother Sir Gareth is slain!" He begs to see the dead bodies, but Arthur has had them buried, lest the sight cause Gawain double pain. It falls to the king's lot to tell that the deed was done by Lancelot, and Gawain's incredulity, strong at first, has finally to yield. Then the work of years is undone in a moment: Gawain takes a vow, in the most solemn terms a knight of the Table Round could use:

> My king, my lord, and mine uncle, said Sir Gawain, Wit you well now I shall make you a promise that I shall hold by my knighthood, that from this day I shall never fail Sir Lancelot until the one of us have slain the other. . . . For I promise unto God, said Sir Gawain, for the death of my brother Sir Gareth I shall seek Sir Lancelot throughout seven kings' realms, but I shall slay him or else he shall slay me."[1]

Thus reverting to type, strong in conviction of his own righteousness, Gawain becomes the implacable instrument of vengeance.

III

So is the realm destroyed; for this relentless hate rends it asunder till the end. Arthur, cold except toward his knights and his kingdom, would gladly once and again have compounded the quarrel, and Lancelot fights against his king with breaking heart: "God defend me, said Sir Lancelot, that ever I should encounter with the most noble king that made me knight."[2] But Gawain never changes. The Christianizing work of chivalry is all undone in him, and he returns with

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 10, p. 355.

[2] *Ibid.*, xx., 11, p. 356.

his might to the ancient code of honor, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. It is difficult to be severe on Gawain: neither men nor nations have outgrown that code.

Arthur and Gawain, encamped before Joyous Garde, carry on a long and dreadful siege. Very splendid knights hold with Lancelot: his own House, naturally, Bors, Lionel, Ector de Maris; also the special friends of Tristram, as Palomides and Hebes le Renommé, who have transferred their allegiance to him; and many more, some for his own sake and some for that of the queen. As for Arthur, his host is big, assembled by summons from all the strength of the realm, but it is somewhat undistinguished. Lancelot forbears the king at every turn: holds his own, protects his lady, and wearily reiterates the false formula of her innocence and honor. His gentleness, his winning speech, that air of greatness which he never loses as he entreats and pleads, might have softened Arthur's heart. But the words of Gawain cut in, trenchant as swords. He too, in speech, forbears the queen, but he flings the death of Gareth in Lancelot's teeth; and Lancelot, remorseful and full of sorrow over that death as he is, yet finds himself forced to spirited altercation, and to a hint at that old rumor, that Gawain too has not been free from the reproach of slaying his brother in arms. Gawain is ready now to boast of the deed. "Ah, false knight," said Sir Gawain: "That thou meanest by Sir Lamorak. Wit thou well, I slew him." "Ye slew him not yourself," said Sir Lancelot: "It had been overmuch on hand for you to have slain him"[1] and the contemptuous hint that Lamorak was killed "by forecast of treason" adds fuel to Gawain's ire.

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 11, p. 358.

So the great fighting comes on: and the troops of Lancelot issue from the castle in formal order, with almost a ritual touch,—Lancelot himself from the middle gate, Lionel and Bors from the gates on either side. Then indeed fratricidal terror rules the day, relieved only by Lancelot's sad courtesy. Bors has Arthur at his mercy, and is ready to kill him at a word. But Lancelot, being Lancelot, bids him refrain: "For I will never see that most noble king that made me knight neither slain ne shamed." So Lancelot raises the king and places him on his own horse; and when King Arthur was on horseback he looked upon Sir Lancelot, and then "the tears brast out of his eyen, thinking on the great courtesy that was in Sir Lancelot more than in any other man."[1] None the less the clash of battle continues, day after weary day: till in the impasse, the Pope,—a personage of whom nothing has previously been heard,—comes to the rescue and with fine disregard of probability sends his command that Arthur receive back his queen.

Unlikely though the message be, it reflects faintly more than one historic situation; and the scene where Guenevere is restored to Arthur might have been culled from the pages of Froissart. There is a great Pageant, the finest spectacle in the *Morte Darthur*, which recalls the entry of Queen Isabel into Paris. The hundred knights in green velvet carrying olive branches, the green and gold of the horses' trappings, the rich jewels, the white cloth of gold tissue in which Lancelot and Guenevere are arrayed, lend dignity as well as pomp to the occasion. The whole ceremony is in the grand French manner, of which Lancelot is master. The talk, however, is yet more interesting. Malory's characters

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 13, p. 360.

do not indulge in long pseudo-classic orations, after the manner of Geoffrey's. But more than one of his people can if needs be make a good speech: and that which Lancelot, on returning the Queen, addresses to Arthur, is the speech of a very great gentleman. Rarely in any mediæval report of actual doings, not even in Froissart himself, are words found so incisive, so appropriate, as these.

The design of Lancelot is to persuade the king to a full reconciliation. His speech begins with formal dignity, but rises swiftly in emotion: and presently Lancelot, who is of course on the defensive, appears in a new rôle. Partly from real humility, but largely from good taste, he has always been studiously modest in talk, ever preferring others to himself. Now he speaks out,—proving himself thereby lineal heir of the old epic tradition which demanded from its hero no less zest in bragging than zeal in fighting. He whose modesty has seemed at times almost overwrought, who has been apparently pained by praise and who has always deprecated honors, now breaks into vivid self-assertion: "For now I will make avaunt," said Sir Lancelot, and splendid bragging it is, sonorous, outspoken, honest, as he proclaims his might, his exploits, his loyalty, his special services to Arthur and to Gawain:

And I take God to record, said Sir Lancelot, I never was wroth nor greatly heavy with no good knight an I saw him busy about to win worship, and glad I was ever when I found any knight that might endure me. . . . Howbeit, Sir Carados of the Dolorous Tower was a full noble knight and a passing strong man, and that wot ye, my lord Sir Gawain; for he might well be called a noble knight when he by fine force pulled you out of your saddle and bound you over-

thwart afore him to his saddle bow, and there my lord Sir Gawain I rescued you, and slew him afore your sight. . . . And therefore, said Sir Lancelot unto Sir Gawain, meseemeth ye ought of right to remember this; for an I might have your good will, I would trust to God to have my lord Arthur's good grace.[1]

Such self-assertion is the last touch needed to humanize Lancelot; the dialogue that follows is a sort of glorification of the flyting scenes in the old sagas. But it naturally maddens Gawain. With sharp brevity, he recalls the death of his brothers; and then surge out in great overflow the sorrow, the remorse, the shame, that underlie all sense of his own value in Lancelot's heart. The proud defender of his own honor becomes the penitent, offering reparation to the uttermost. He will go barefoot in his shirt throughout all England, from Sandwich to Carlisle, founding at every ten miles houses of religion wherein masses shall be sung day and night for the souls of Gareth and Gaheris; and this will he do so long as his substance shall endure. "And this Sir Gawain methinketh were more fairer, holier and more better to their souls, than ye, my most noble king, and you, Sir Gawain, to war upon me, for thereby shall ye get none avail."[2] It is a majestic offer. All knights and ladies there wept as they had been mad, and the tears fell on King Arthur's cheeks. Yet very sadly, Lancelot, rebuffed and repelled, receives his sentence: banishment from the land of Logres.

It is for that land itself, rather than for aught else, that he sorrows,—the land, which is to him no mere geographical expression but a beloved person. "Alas,"

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 15, p. 365.

[2] *Ibid.*, xx., 16, p. 366.

he cries, "most noble Christian realm, whom I have loved above all other realms!"[1] One more passage of recriminating words, Shakespearean in vigor, one last kiss to the Queen, openly in the sight of all men,—and, to the sound of sobbing and weeping, Lancelot is gone. He had had seemingly no expectation of banishment. In the ensuing colloquy with his followers, held in that Joyous Garde which he now renames Dolorous Garde, his rueful devotion to Arthur and to England flash through the hurt feeling and angry pride of a strong man disgraced. But he takes his sentence, albeit his followers are ready to stand by him if he be disposed to dispute it; and departs regretfully, his last thought for the realm. His friends have insisted that the peace of the kingdom has depended on him.

> Truly, said Sir Lancelot, I thank you all of your good saying; howbeit I wot well, in me was not all the stability of this realm, but in that I might I did my devoir; and well I am sure I knew many rebellions in my days that by me were peaced, and I trow we all shall hear of them in short space, and that me sore repenteth. For ever I dread me, said Sir Lancelot, that Sir Mordred will make trouble.[2]

Lancelot and his kin, as Malory now first mentions, are lords of all France; thither they betake them, landing at Benwick or Bayonne, and there Lancelot parts the land among his friends, keeping it would seem nothing for himself. Thither Gawain goads Arthur, and they depart, leaving England at the mercy of whoso will. Fierce fighting ensues on French soil. The most interesting thing about it is the contrast with the early continental wars recorded in the first books of the

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 17; p. 367, *cf.* p. 123.
[2] *Ibid.*, xx., 18, p. 370.

Morte. Then, political interests were to the fore; the story was wholly concerned with the bloodiness of the conflict; and slight attention was paid to human or personal matters. Now, the exact contrary obtains. Into the fighting no one except Gawain can put any heart, but the prolonged pathos of the struggle, in which Lancelot ever forbears the king and restrains his knights, grows hateful and painful. Lancelot is as non-resistant as it is in flesh and blood to be, but the time comes when he must defend him, "or else be recreant." It is Gawain who forces him, Gawain who stands at the center, Gawain ever if possible more and more vehement, more and more unyielding. Again and again Gawain is wounded only to renew the fight. His mysterious increase of strength in the morning stands him in good stead, and for hours the fight is all but even; but Lancelot wins out at last. Horribly wounded, Gawain sinks on his side in a swoon. "And anon as he did awake, he waved and foined at Sir Lancelot as he lay, and said, 'Traitor knight, . . . I am not yet slain, come thou near me and perform this battle unto the uttermost.'" Lancelot declines, "for to smite a wounded man that may not stand, God defend me from such a shame"[1]: and he returns to the city, Gawain calling Traitor! after him all the way. This is real hate and a real fight.

Arthur falls ill with the despair of it: Gawain lies wounded and fuming. And tidings come from England that recall the king and his host. For the prediction of Lancelot is fulfilled. Now comes to the front the sinister figure of Mordred,—held in the background from the moment of his begetting, every now and then recalled to memory as he moves like a shadow

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xx., 22, p. 378.

across the scene, always consorting with the worst of knights, always evil in speech, evil in thought and deed. Malory does not elaborate his portrait, and it is perhaps more effective as a mere "midmost blotch of black," the analyzed study being reserved for characters in whom there is more give and take of good and bad. Malory's Mordred like his Arthur is a symbol rather than a man, and his part is played, not in the central drama where men and women must be individuals or nothing, but in that wide environing action which gives majesty and typical connotation to the plot, but which requires for its outworking embodied forces of good and evil rather than breathing men and women.

While Lancelot and Gawain battle in France, Mordred the real traitor, treacherous not through weakness like Lancelot, but through ingrained meanness and ambition, Mordred the bastard of Arthur, seizes the throne and aspires to the hand of Guenevere. Strangely enough, he carries England with him. The scornfully aristocratic trend in Malory is never more salient than in his contemptuous remark that "The most part of all England held with Sir Mordred, the people were so new-fangle."[1] Arthur has often seemed to be king in a cloud-country, with topography unknown on our old planet; but the Arthuriad is after all the epic of the soil, and now the catastrophe is definitely placed. It is in Canterbury that Mordred is crowned, it is in Winchester that he seizes Guenevere, and "said plainly that he would wed her which was his uncle's wife and his father's wife."[2] Guenevere does not wait helpless this time for a knight errant to come out of dreamland and rescue her: she behaves practically; with the

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xxi., 1, p. 381. [2] *Ibid.*, xxi., 1, p. 379.

initiative of a vigorous mediæval English queen she throws herself into the Tower of London, where Mordred besieges her in vain. The Bishop of Canterbury, having relieved his mind by doing the cursing on Mordred "in the most orgulist wise that might be done," betakes him to poverty and holy prayers as a priest-hermit at Glastonbury. Mordred with a great host awaits Arthur's coming at Dover; and the tale goes on, succinct, impassioned, in manner too familiar for either comment or summary, to the inevitable end: the drear great battle of the West where Arthur and Mordred slay each the other, the devastation of the realm, and the final misty glimpse of a magic barque borne over the sea to Avalon.

IV

The fate which is rooted in personality was surely never more fully expounded than in this complex scheme of sin and retribution. Arthur, Guenevere, Gawain, and Lancelot, reap alike the harvest of that character which is destiny. There is no unmerited sorrow here, falling pointlessly on the guiltless, as in Tennyson's version of the old story,—a version which is fortunately losing its hold on enthusiasm. The law of causation works firmly, steadily, and profoundly; and close analysis reveals delicate balancings and adjustments, by which, despite the seemingly chaotic weaving of the mediæval pattern, every instinct of poetic justice is satisfied.

Arthur, as foretold by Merlin's dark hints, suffers for his early lawlessness, and thereby the whole easily unmoral scheme of conduct which exists unrebuked in the earlier phases of this romance, and in much

mediæval literature, receives its condemnation. He has sinned half-unwittingly, and for the most aggravated and repulsive feature of his deed he is hardly to be judged responsible. Yet the very carelessness which makes it possible for him to be the father of Mordred witnesses to a wild civilization and a casual idea of relationships. Lancelot, however, product of a more highly evolved and more conscious stage of ethics, suffers more cruelly. His wrong-doing and his punishment are both on a higher level; and he is racked less by material catastrophe than by anguish of the heart. As for Gawain, he represents, as has been seen, the survival of what in previous times had been the only code of heroic honor, into a period on which a new and better code had dawned. He commands our sympathy in his wavering between the two; but he knows the last code to be the truer, and in discarding it he sins against light. Through these diverse sins is the realm of Logres destroyed. For the most cruel feature of the tragedy is the illustration it affords of a stern social law; our sins do not react in injury on ourselves alone but undermine the civilization which perhaps we would give our lives to guard.

The ideal of chivalry has two types of adversary; those without its pale, whether Romans, Paynims, or bad knights at large, and those within, pledged by its vows, who betray its shelter by their false emphases or partial assimilations. The first type does not give much trouble, after the early years. It is the second that proves fatal. Chivalry is destroyed, not from without but from within.

Plain black evil, lurking at the heart of it, is represented by Mordred, product of sin from the beginning. Mordred like the other knights swore in the great

yearly Pentecostal vow to "flee treason." But his place might be with the archtraitors, Brutus, Cassius, and Judas, ground by the jaws of Satan in Dante's nethermost and frozen Hell. In a nation or a heart, treachery always stalks, waiting its moment to pounce and to destroy. Mordred's figure is a very simple one however, and as has been said Malory does not feel any necessity of dwelling at length on him.

The more insidious wrongs, that poison chivalry at the roots, are wrought by men who are not intrinsically bad at all, but who err from a false sense of relative values. The sins of the chief characters are due, not to anything bad in the standards that they follow, but to a partial emphasis, and a failure to grasp the chivalric ideal in its wholeness. Every one of them, with the exception of Mordred, clings to an allegiance good in itself—but clings to that only. Even Lancelot, whose soul unlike that of the others is open on every side. denies his king and his God:

> "His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
> And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."[1]

It is not enough to respond to the loyalties: one must also reconcile them.

Thus it comes to pass that the conclusion of the *Morte Darthur* presents, not merely the tragic death of Arthur and his queen, but the death of the Middle Ages. The epoch witnessed a great experiment in living; and it failed, through the ancient failure to harmonize factors good in themselves but evil if stressed in isolation. The Hellenic ideal of moral and intellectual symmetry was beyond the mediæval range. The only solution that the age could offer was a confession of

[1] Tennyson.

defeat,—the only substitute, an extreme asceticism, which, though men were unaware of the fact, contradicted their ideal because it was treachery to life itself. Galahad is as responsible as Mordred, or as Lancelot, for the destruction of the Table Round. In one way or another, every character fails to keep the vow of "the high order of knighthood," for not one succeeds in "fleeing treason": wittingly or unwittingly, each in his turn betrays the fullness of truth.

V

So sets the mediæval day; yet a light shines through the shadows. The last book leaves us, not distressed, but calm, our eyes fixed on the horizon of those wide waters over which Arthur has vanished. Mature criticism prefers the rendering of these final scenes in Malory to any sentimental modernization. This is because it gives, not only a satisfied sense of justice, but an outlook toward Eternity.

Gawain, smitten on the old wound inflicted by Lancelot, dies as result of the skirmish in the landing of Arthur's troops at Dover: and he repents him full knightly and completely: "Had Sir Lancelot been with you as he was,"—so he speaks when Arthur finds him lying more than half dead in a great boat,—"this unhappy war had never begun. And of all this am I causer, for Sir Lancelot and his blood . . . held all your cankered enemies in subjection and danger."[1] The "cedle" which Gawain writes Lancelot, "Two hours and a half afore my death . . . subscribed with part of my heart's blood,"[2] however absurd from a literal point of view, fully reinstates him in our affections. It is full, not of vain expressions, but of true penitence,

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xxi., 2, p. 382.

[2] *Ibid.*, xxi., 2, p. 383.

of a love for Lancelot which revives at the solemn moment of death, and above all of that thought for Arthur and for England in which he and Lancelot are one. The last glimpse of Gawain is through Arthur's dream,—a very old part of the story,—where Gawain appears in Paradise, surrounded by the ladies whom he has succored according to the vow whereby Guenevere had bound him; these ladies have received the grace to bring him to Arthur, that he may deliver a warning,—true, though given alas in vain,—not to fight on the morrow. This delivered, he vanishes from ken, but vanishes into peace.

Arthur does not see Guenevere after his return to England. There has long been between these two only a political bond. But well and wofully he dies, smitten of Mordred, and his passing shall last as long as English speech endures. It is part of the usual irony of destiny that the battle comes about by accident at the end,—the real agent being an adder, whose sting causes a knight to draw his sword against orders. The murder of an archduke is also an accident; it is useless, in such cases, to shift responsibility from causes to occasions. Malory does his work briefly now; but every word tells. There is in these pages a quality of drearihead and heroic awe which makes the prose immortal; and human emotion breaks through the rhythmic phrase, as where we read how "they fought all the long day and never stinted till the noble knights were laid in the cold earth."[1] The crisis comes in a line, a word: Mordred, who has been leaning on his sword among a great heap of dead, receives his death-wound from the king, and turns in his agony: "And right so he smote his father Arthur,"[2]—what more could there be said?

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xxi., 4, p. 386.

[2] *Ibid.*, xxi., 4, p. 387.

Those who were with Arthur at the beginning of his career are with him still,—Lucan and Bedivere. And so Excalibur is reluctantly thrown into the lake,—for the glory of the realm is gone,—and the barge draws near with the weeping queens. Morgan the mischief-maker is Morgan the healer at the last; the note of Celtic magic, more ancient than all the bells of Christendom, sounds in this passing as Arthur is borne away, to be tended by her hands and by those of Merlin's old love Nimue, in Avalon. Bedivere may find Arthur's tomb the next morning in the chapel at Glastonbury, and be assured by the one-time Bishop of Canterbury that ladies had brought a corpse to burial. But the Hope of Britain lives forever, and on that very tomb is written, with superb inconsistency, HIC JACET ARTHURUS REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS. Arthur is less a man than kingship incarnate, and, democracy to the contrary notwithstanding, kingship shall never die.

The national epic is over, and with the end of it, the interest of Geoffrey and the chroniclers had ceased. Nor did the prose romances pursue their theme beyond this end. Nationally, and materially speaking, the Arthuriad closes in failure and is rightly called a Morte. The Table Round is destroyed, the purpose of its being is thwarted, and the Grail has revisited Logres in vain. England is no more obedient to the law of Christ than before Joseph of Arimathea crossed the sea, or Arthur girt him with Excalibur. But there is some little comfort. From the personal point of view, the Christian ideal triumphs in every case:

> If we could wait! The only fault's with Time!
> All men become good creatures,—but so slow![1]

[1] Browning, *Luria*.

Each character in the story, except Mordred, is left on a higher level, his spiritual victory won.

As the Middle Ages went on, men had come more and more to center thought and love on the supreme miracle, on Persons. To compare mediæval literature in the large with that of Greece and Rome is to realize what transformation had been wrought by the Christian shifting of solicitude from State to Soul. In this emphasis on the interior life, with its attendant disciplines, many phenomena have found their source: modern psychology, for instance, and the modern novel. And under such influences the Arthuriad had undergone deep inward change. Arthur is safe in Avalon, but the heart still broods over the two who have caused the loss of him: Lancelot and Guenevere.

Lancelot, summoned back to England by Gawain's letter, must first visit Gawain's tomb, to pray and weep. Thence, regardless of peril, he must ride alone through the disordered realm, to seek the rumored nunnery at Almesbury, where lives "a nun in white clothes and black" that was Queen Guenevere. To men of English speech, no lovers' parting can surpass this,—recorded in a page and a half of which each word strikes home. Guenevere is last of Malory's people to emerge from shadow into reality; but she stands out now at the last in a clear and noble light. She has repented with the repentance of a queen, and noteworthy insight represents her rather than Lancelot taking at the end the attitude of renunciation:

"Therefore, Sir Lancelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never see me more in the visage, and I command thee on God's behalf that thou forsake my company, and to thy

kingdom thou turn again, and keep well thy realm from war and wrack. For as well as I have loved thee, mine heart will not serve me to see thee, for through thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed. Therefore, Sir Lancelot, go to thy realm, and there take thee a wife, and live with her with joy and bliss; and I pray thee heartily, pray for me to our Lord that I may amend my misliving."[1]

These are no empty words; there is no touch of pose in them. She means them entirely, and she refuses the last kiss for which he begs. For Lancelot, truly though he repents, is masculine, and human: "Wherefore madam I pray you kiss me, and never no more," says he. "Nay," says the queen, "that shall I never do, but abstain you from such works."[2] Her final prayer in dying is that she may never see him again. Here is the final picture shown by the Middle Ages of romantic love. That love was in its day the fairest thing the world had known. It was an immense advance on the attitude of man toward woman in Greek days or Roman; still more on the predatory attitude not wholly unknown even to Malory's pages. It had been one of the most important factors in softening and elevating the life of Western Europe, it had initiated men into a literally new world. Slowly it had risen from sentiment and etiquette into a human and convincing passion. Now, through the touch of penitence, it lifts itself at last into a spiritual purity. Its work is done.

As for Lancelot, best and longest loved of mediæval protagonists, his real repentance is illustrated by the fact that he has forgotten what really prevented him from winning the Grail. He says, and believes, in the parting from Guenevere, that it was fealty to Arthur

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xxi., 9, p. 394.

[2] *Ibid.*, xxi., 10, p. 395.

which brought him back into the world: "For in the quest of the Sangreal I had forsaken the vanities of the world had not your lord been."[1] And it is no merely formal device that shows Lancelot in a priest's habit at the last. The priestly heart was in him always; it conquers at the end. No grief need be spent over him as he "dried and dwined away" in the hermitage by Arthur's tomb; for he and his fellows, the few surviving knights, are exceedingly at peace through a great repentance. Bors is with him, having found him in his retreat; and Bedivere, who has not left his masters' tomb; and within the next half year come seven others, mostly those of his House. There is not much to tell of the seven years after they "take them to perfection," while their horses—delightful touch!—go where they would; but seven years is time enough to traverse long reaches of the mystic way. Heaven deals tenderly with Lancelot; it bids him, by a vision thrice repeated, bring Guenevere to her burial by Arthur's side. And when he saw her visage in death, "he wept not greatly, but sighed," and sung her dirge and mass as a priest should do, and he brought her to Glastonbury in procession, with an hundred torches ever burning, with chants and frankincense, and buried her beside her lord. In these last pages, especially in Lancelot's lament over the graves, Malory recovers that peculiar and haunting beauty of phrase, most frequent in the Grail books, which seems in him to accompany spiritual suggestion: "For evermore day and night he prayed, but sometime he slumbered a broken sleep; ever he was lying groveling on the tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guenevere."[2]

He is not himself to be buried with them,[3] though he

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xxi., 9, p. 395.

[2] *Ibid.*, xxi., 12; p. 398.

[3] *Cf.* p. 133.

fain would be. Long ago, he had made his vow to lie by Galahad le Haut Prince, the noble friend of his youth, at Joyous Garde; there he had discovered his true name, in the very tomb destined to receive his body; thither he must return when his hour has come. Gently it comes and quietly. It is right natural that the Bishop of Canterbury, his fellow-hermit, when advised in dreams of his passing, should fall on a great sweet laughter, and be ready to tell of angelic hosts, bearing Lancelot into Heaven,—natural that "he lay as he had smiled, and the sweetest savor about him that ever they felt."[1] His bier at least may be the same that Guenevere was laid in before she was buried.

And as his body lies in the choir at Joyous Garde,—that castle rich in memories of dolour as of joy,—and the priests are at their service, who should come to the door but Sir Ector de Maris? For Ector and Lionel had not made them priests or hermits. Lionel had been slain, while seeking Lancelot, in London; and Ector, careless of the fact that he was king across the sea, had seven years roamed all England, Scotland, and Wales, seeking his brother Sir Lancelot. It is not the first time that Ector has arrived where Lancelot is, to find himself shut out and exiled where his brother keeps high feast. There is no betaking him to perfection for such as Ector, and he does not even recognize his old comrades in the chanting emaciated priests, till Bors makes himself known. Then he can only throw away his shield and sword and helm, and swoon, and weep. But because of the great love he bore his brother, because of the sheer force of human devotedness that was in him, it is granted him to pronounce the famous Elegy that is the Elegy of all true knighthood:

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xxi., 12, p. 399.

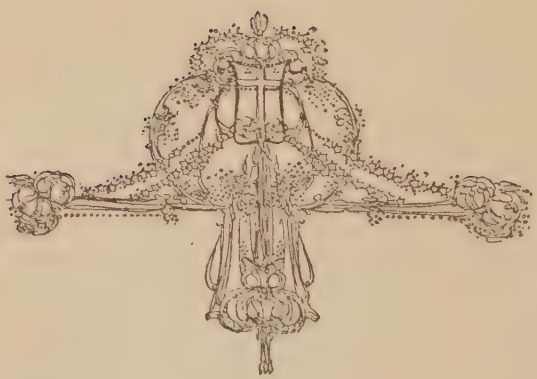
"Ah, Lancelot, he said, thou were head of all christian knights, and now I dare say, said Sir Ector, thou Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust knight that ever bare shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse. And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest."[1]

This is the end; and Bors and Ector and Blamore and Bleoberis go into the Holy Land and die there on a Good Friday, fighting the Infidel. At least so says the French book which Malory considers "authorized," though he makes an interesting allusion here to English books, unknown to us, that say these knights went never again out of England. In any case, Constantine, Sir Cador's son of Cornwall, is chosen king, and worshipfully he rules. All is well at the last. Slaughter has devastated the realm, and the fair order of the Table Round is overthrown. This for the sins of men and for their blindness. But the greatest craving of the imagination is satisfied, for law has triumphed and the spirit lives. This English national epic, the *Morte Darthur*, like the French epic, the *Song of Roland*, chronicles defeat. Yet because of its unfaltering witness to the victory of justice, and to the eternal in the midst of time, all readers can say with old Caxton—to whom after Malory chief thanks are due: "Here

[1] *Morte Darthur*, xxi., 13, p. 400.

endeth this noble and joyous book." Noble and joyous indeed;—it is the swan-song of chivalry.

And when Arthur comes again, perhaps the quest of the Grail will not disparple the Fellowship any longer. For men will conceivably have learned that the search for spiritual vision leads to no mystic land across the sea, but back to Camelot. They may accept at last the ideal dimly in the mind of some among the dreamers of the old story; they may know it their high task to convert the very land of Logres into a worthy shrine for the secret sanctities of God.



PART III

MALORY AND HIS SOURCES

CHAPTER I

MALORY'S INTERWEAVINGS

A FINAL attempt to appraise Malory's art must be based on a comparison of the *Morte Darthur* with the sources from which it was drawn.

Such a comparison is full of interest, but it calls for a caution at the outset. No one can tell how far Malory's book is original, and how far it may lean on some intermediate source, now lost, in which the process of combination and compression had already been carried out. After the tremendous expansion of romantic material which began in the early thirteenth century had spent itself, a counter process of condensation had set in: compilations, and books of extracts, were fairly common, and Malory may have had access to one or more. The *Morte Darthur* is based on many long romances, and it is a question whether a simple Warwickshire knight would have had so large a number in his library. Dr. Sommer presupposes an undiscovered source, resting on some *Brut*, or imaginative history of England, and enlarged to include full treatment of the reigns of Uther and Leodogan and of the Table Round. "The French book" to which Malory frequently alludes may thus have been one solitary book of moderate size. One may conjecture that he picked it up during his campaign in France; one may conjecture

anything! There may have been several books rather than one; a passage at the end of Malory's Book XIX. rather implies this. Here the author apologizes for not giving more of Sir Lancelot's adventures, and "overskips great books" of them, on the ground that he had "lost the very matter" of the Chevalier du Chariot —his manuscript being apparently incomplete at this point. So "I depart from the tale of Sir Lancelot, and here I go unto the Morte of King Arthur," says Malory; the use of two volumes at least is clearly suggested.

And until some definite book which might have served as his original shall be forthcoming, there is nothing to disprove the assumption that the ultimate labor of selection and compression was Malory's own. The dispassionate reader certainly receives the impression that some one man of great individual genius was responsible for the *Morte Darthur* as it stands. And the admirable style, of which no one can rob Sir Thomas, a style incomparably in advance of any other the period can show, would indicate that Malory may well have been that man.

For the *Morte Darthur* is unique, not so much in its type as in its genius. The fifteenth century was a great period of *rifacimenti*. It invented little or nothing, but it delighted in adapting old material. Fifteenth-century translations are not to be criticized for not reaching a modern standard of accuracy, because they never aimed at such a standard, being content to paraphrase or retell in their own way. But if the authors evaded the labors of the careful translator on the one hand, they almost entirely escaped the energies of genuine creation on the other. They transcribed languidly, expanding or compressing at will, but rarely investing their expansions with freshness or rendering

their compressed matter with felicity. In the Arthurian field, characteristic examples are afforded by the wooden prose *Merlin*, translated from the French about twenty-five years before the *Morte* was published, or by the hopeless though fairly literal transcripts of great prose into mean verse accomplished by Herry Lovelich. Malory certainly does not belong in the same class with these authors.

And if the *Morte* rises quite above the crowd of fifteenth-century transcripts and adaptations in architectonic power,—to borrow Matthew Arnold's phrase,—it differs yet more in plan from the ordinary mediæval method, illustrated by Chaucer, Gower, or Boccaccio. This method placed old stories bodily in some special setting, original with the author,—a pilgrimage, a garden festival, a series told by a priest of Venus to his penitent, visions shown by the god of love or by some other master of the revels. The device is effective and simple, and literature is always likely to revert to it from time to time, as in the case of Morris' *Earthly Paradise*. But it does not contribute much to the development of a real sense for narrative structure. In Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, for instance, the setting, clogged by garrulous moralizing, has the scantiest possible relation to the stories, and "Genius," who speaks, even apologizes for dragging in illustrations of the Seven Deadly Sins to develop the theme of the Lover's devotion. Perhaps only Chaucer has escaped all awkwardness and irrelevancy in the use of such a method; for in *The Canterbury Tales* each speaker tells a story which throws light on his own personality and gains additional point from the narrator, and the whole is an integrated work of art. But *The Canterbury Tales* remained half told.

The method of the *Morte Darthur*, on the other hand, with its fusion of various stories into one, marks a distinct advance in structural instinct. The book could have been written only when it was. No future "Corpus" of Victorian fiction is likely to attempt a novel composed of patches from *The Pickwick Papers* and *Vanity Fair*, with interpolated chapters from *Tess* and *Adam Bede*. But the *Morte* drew on a tradition which, though preserved in numerous works, possessed common features, and, to a degree, common characters; and it condensed this tradition at a moment when feeling for integrated and motived artistic work was dawning at last.

Sommer's study of Malory's sources, contained in the first volume of his edition (1890), is drawn, so far as the prose *Lancelot* is concerned, from the printed edition of 1543. His later reprints from manuscripts in the British Museum facilitate comparison greatly, although it must not be forgotten that no one of these manuscripts presents the precise version followed in the *Morte Darthur;* and it is on the reprints that the present study is based.

The original genius of the author of the *Morte* is primarily evident in his broad principle of selection and arrangement. And the first point where personal initiative appears is in the choice to begin *in medias res*, instead of following the chief characters from their babyhood, as earlier romance had done. There seems no reason to accept the frequent statement that Malory could not have known the opening portions of the prose *Lancelot;* deliberate choice in the omission of these portions must have come in somewhere, whether with Malory or with his predecessors. The omission might

have proceeded from nothing more creative than common sense, cognizant of the tremendous ground to cover: but it has the felicitous result of presenting a complete dramatic action such as is beyond the scope of the biographical romances. The necessary tale of Arthur's begetting and youth, much condensed, is given; a few paragraphs are devoted to the childhood of Tristram. All the other characters are introduced in full maturity, as contemporaries gathered around the central person of the king, and the action in consequence opens at one point as it were instead of returning on itself for successive beginnings.

A good story might have been made from a mere condensation of the prose *Lancelot*. But the author of the *Morte* had a wider outlook. His most important decision was that in which he determined to draw from a variety of sources. The first four books accordingly follow the French Merlin romances, which had absorbed so much of the old legendary history of Britain. Then the author—and at this point it is irresistible to call him Malory—broke off, to draw the material for his fifth book, which narrates the British conquest over Rome, from an English poem, the alliterative *Morte Arthur*. Aware that it was time for his hero to be presented, he proceeded in Book VI. to condense a few selected passages from the prose *Lancelot;* but he resisted the temptation to continue on the lines of this romance, and drew from some source unknown the picture of chivalry in its prime, the story of Gareth.[1]

Then came a great decision. Instead of reverting to the *Lancelot*, which would have been the obvious thing to do, he inserted long passages, comprising three

[1] *Cf.* p. 218.

books in Caxton's edition, from a rival romance complete in itself, the prose *Tristram*. The advantages of this choice are so great that it would seem as if they must have been consciously sought. Uncritical sympathy at this point in the story must be claimed for *L'amour courtois;* and the Tristram books present love on a stage where it can reign supreme and unquestioned, instead of showing it in Arthur's court, where it would be instantly recognized as a menace to the realm. Ingenious touches throughout the books, moreover, as our study has already shown, further the main action.

The Tristram books occupy almost a third of the whole *Morte*, and even so the author has not cared to pursue the story of the fated lovers to the end. It is evident that he is interested in them, not for their own sake, but as they hold a place in his completed picture; and as soon as Palomides is christened, or even a little before, the prose *Lancelot* is resumed, the transition being accomplished by a naïve interweaving of chapters from the two sources. From this point on, the *Lancelot*, with one or two doubtful exceptions, furnishes all that the author needs, and he follows it to the end. After the advent of the Grail, the story moves straight along the lines of the older romance, though the effects are sharpened by free compression, by changes of order, and by innumerable firm minor touches bringing out into fuller light the emotion more or less smothered in the old French.

A closer comparison of Malory's work with this his most important source will follow. Meantime, interesting facts about his general method emerge from this brief summary. And the outstanding fact is that, by deferring so long as he has done his use of the *Lancelot*, he has effected a complete change of emphasis.

He has replaced an obvious and straightforward story in which light is thrown exclusively on Lancelot and his friends, by a many-facetted treatment which restores Arthur, the great king, to the center of the stage. This fact alone would establish a presumption that this last stage of compilation, whether written in French or English, was accomplished in the British Isles. For the English emphasis is almost wholly absent in the prose *Lancelot;* if Walter Map gave this romance its animus, his enthusiasm was pure Norman. The romance ignores all matter which would tend to the exaltation of Arthur, and treats the king as contemptuously as it dares, though there is something about the traditional figure which prevented even the most alien writer from degrading him to the type of Mark. But Malory, bound to restore the dignity of his king, renews stress on the Arthuriad as the national epic, by narrating the circumstances of the birth and accession, which the *Lancelot* had merely assumed. The same result is aided by the place which he assigns to the wars of conquest. The *Lancelot* introduced them rather casually, late in the story, having forgotten or deferred them till they are pointless; and when they appear they are so confused with other interests that they command slight attention. Malory isolates them and gives them emphatic place toward the beginning; his fifth book, though curt and lacking in romantic interest, is essential to the impression of glorious achievements which he desires to convey.

Another suggestive result gained by the combination of sources, is that chivalry is presented in the making instead of already made. In the *Lancelot*, the hero grows up in a realm thoroughly under Arthur's control, where the laws and customs of chivalry are an accepted

and static code; and the sentimentality of tone which mars the romance may well be due in part to the falsetto key in which it is pitched,—a key too high to maintain and subject to no variations. By fusing other narratives with the *Lancelot*, Malory has avoided this danger, and has secured an entirely different effect. The early books of the *Morte* show the gradual growth of the ideal as it struggles toward self-realization; the Tristram books admirably suggest the disorder and gross conditions prevalent in outlying regions, contrasted with the "gentilesse" of the Table Round. Through these contrasts, Malory gains something in which the *Lancelot* is wholly deficient, an effective background for his main action. His world is a world of growth and effort, where wider forces and an ampler development obtain than could be suggested by a picture confined to Arthur's fellowship in its prime. For his purpose, the early adventures of Lancelot and his relatives, so copiously told in the French romance, are irrelevant; and though in omitting them he often misses stories very interesting in themselves, they are sacrificed without hesitation.

The piecing, in the English *Morte Darthur*, is done roughly enough. There are plenty of cracks and flaws and no attempt is made to fill the very evident joints with literary putty. Transitions give no trouble, and minor inconsistencies abound. Whether or no there are deeper inconsistencies, whether for instance the attitude toward the characters shifts according to the varying animus of the source-romances, is a question open to discussion; at all events, the carelessness in detail is responsible for the fact that the effect of compilation sometimes overpowers the effect of unity. Yet it is only necessary to gain a little perspec-

tive, in order to find all such carelessness merged in the general impression of proportion and design, finer than can be shown by any of the complex romances from which the book derives.

CHAPTER II

THE "MORTE DARTHUR" AND THE PROSE "LANCELOT"

MALORY'S handling of the material derived from the Merlin and the Tristram romances would be a fruitful subject for close study. Space however does not allow us to pursue that study further here, and we must now concentrate our minds on a further comparison of the *Morte Darthur* with the prose *Lancelot.*

The English *Morte* uses a very small proportion of the material in this French romance. The adventures in Malory's sixth book, which opens with Lancelot sleeping under an apple tree and visited by three queens, occur when the French *Lancelot* is two thirds over. They are there immediately followed by the visit to Carbonek and the begetting of Galahad. Malory on the other hand gives a sense of long elapsing time between the two series of events; for after the miscellaneous incidents in Book VI., which serve mainly to define the eminence of his hero, he inserts the Gareth story and all the Tristram interests. During the many years implied in these sections of the romance, the figure of Lancelot flits across the scene, rather shadowy but more and more exalted; till the inception of the Grail story finds the reader eager to know more of the protagonist and prepared to appreciate him to the full.

The relation before the Quest has been "intimate but indirect"; it now becomes direct and so continues till the end.

There are however many interesting changes in order and detail. Perhaps the most important is the position of the episode of the Charrette, or the Rape of Guenevere. In the English *Morte Darthur* it will be remembered that this episode occurs after Lancelot has returned from the Grail-Quest, between the death of Elaine of Astolat and the healing of the wounds of Sir Urre; but in the *Lancelot*, the story precedes not only the Quest, but even the Adventure of the Three Queens with which Malory opens. There are advantages in both positions. Introduced at an early point, as in the *Lancelot*, the episode serves to suggest how wild and gross were the conditions in the early part of Arthur's reign. Introduced later as in Malory, it brings the story back with effective dramatic contrast, to the earthly sin and passion from which the Quest had vainly sought to release the Table Round. Malory does not need the story early for he has conveyed his impression sufficiently by other means; but he does need to renew that impression, or rather to suggest the permanent background of lawlessness held in check with difficulty by the chivalric code. The episode introduced at just this point suggests the futility of the Grail-Quest and procures the right tone for the final tragedy. It is also in fine rhythmic unison with the poisoning of Sir Patrise, the second episode by which Malory stresses his impending shadow. Each episode is the occasion of an Ordeal of Guenevere, and by introducing the Rape at this late point, the Ordeals are brought into close proximity on an ascending scale. Malory's sensitive art could never have introduced an Ordeal of

the queen by fire during the early years when her regal dignity was unimpaired.

This is not the only change which helps to make the dramatic sequence strong and clear, and to transform what in the old romance had been a mere sequence of incidents into a motived and progressive whole. Yet it must not be supposed that Malory is always superior to his source. Sometimes, the old romance has a richer romantic tone. The introduction to the Quest, for instance, is better handled there; for Malory's eleventh book is scanted and hurried, partly perhaps for lack of space, partly from the greater difficulty experienced by a more sophisticated age in sympathizing with the story of Lancelot's relations with Elaine of Carbonek. The tale of Guenevere's jealousy, of Lancelot's madness, is very touching in the older version, and abounds in effective and beautiful details. The child Galahad, for instance, is present in an island castle where the insane Lancelot is living with Elaine, although his father does not know who he is till he is healed by the Grail, and ready to depart. Meantime, Perceval is introduced, and he and Ector have much the same preliminary adventures as in Malory. But the older romance, here and during the Quest, has the advantage that the story of the characters has already been told in full and that they are well known.

Nothing again could be more charming in the way of romantic invention than the incident of the Val Sans Retour where false lovers are retained by Morgan le Fay, or than the Carole of dancing folk bewitched long ago by King Bagdemagus, and finally released by Lancelot from their dreary gayeties. Yet the severity of Malory's selective principle is justified, for all these pleasant matters would be irrelevant to his purpose.

The greatest loss perhaps is the friendship with Galahad le Haut Prince, that majestic and pathetic person who has become a mere name in the English *Morte*. But this figure could not have been introduced without weakening both Lancelot's single-hearted passion for Guenevere and his relation with Gareth. Damon and Pythias must not have mistresses, and Lancelot's genius for comradeship is sufficiently indicated by his devotion to Gareth, a devotion also essential to the catastrophe. The deepening instinct for dramatic economy as narrative matured is well illustrated by this omission.

During the Quest, Malory follows his source more closely than anywhere else; when it is over, his superiority becomes increasingly marked. From the opening of Book XVIII., the successive incidents—the poisoning of Sir Patrise, the death of Elaine of Astolat, the rape of Guenevere, the healing of Sir Urre—show a regard for effective sequence, for contrast and relief, which if not conscious is all the more surprising, and which is entirely absent in the French romance. In particular, the healing of Sir Urre, which so beautifully recalls the Grail-motif and the religious undertone just when these are in danger of being forgotten, enriches the English story. The source of this episode is not known. On the first advent of Lancelot to court, in the French, there is a somewhat similar situation; Lancelot searches and heals the wounds of a sick knight. But this incident lacks the religious intensity which makes the story of Sir Urre so admirable an exordium to the tragic climax, and it leads out into a rather absurd sequence of events. Obviously, the incident must have been found in some version from which Malory worked.

Malory's last two books have a refreshing directness as compared with the clogged motivation and uncertain touch of the French romance. The accusations against the lovers are not focused at one point in the *Lancelot*, but scattered till the effect is feeble. Many dramatic opportunities are missed. The scene of the brothers debating whether to tell Arthur is not there. Agravaine is not killed when he surprises Lancelot in the queen's chamber, but later, at the Ordeal, and the discovery scene is short and flat. That fine motif, the slaying of the unarmed Gareth by Lancelot, and the subsequent vindictive rage of Gawain, are merely hinted, and treated without finesse. Gaheris, whom Lancelot slays, is "he of the nephews of the king whom they of the House of Ban loved more than all others," and "he had ever loved Lancelot more than any stranger knight whom he had known." But Gaheris is armed; it is he who strikes the first blow; and in the final mêlée, it is Ector who strikes off his helmet, although Lancelot then cleaves his head. Dramatic waste and diffusion are everywhere evident as compared with the concentration of the English work.

The great scenes before Joyous Garde are sadly curtailed and flatted in the *Lancelot*. There is none of the superb dialogue beneath the walls of the castle, when Guenevere is returned to Arthur at the instigation of the Pope,—that dialogue which "made the by-standers weep like mad," and produces a like if less obvious effect on our own more sober age. It is not at this point in the French that Lancelot offers to atone for the slaying of Gawain's brothers, but later, when the war has been carried over into France.[1] And then,

[1] Lancelot, we are told at this point, is twenty-one years younger than Gawain, who is seventy-six.

when Arthur and Lancelot are fighting across the Channel, the Roman wars, of all things in the world, are introduced. The French romance reverts here to the original chronicle tradition, which brings Arthur straight home from these wars to the fight with Mordred. But in the ampler development, the effect is very bad. Malory always slurs his wars; he has in particular entirely dropped out the long struggle, necessary to the full epic, by which Lancelot regains his heritage from King Claudas. But he could never have made so confused a blunder as this.

In the final portions of the older work, the same inferiority is constantly apparent. There are no parting scenes, whether between Lancelot and Guenevere or between Guenevere and Arthur. The serpent, which English romance with so fine an irony mentions as the occasion of the fatal battle, is absent, and there is a painful, almost burlesque tone at times, as in the preposterous mode of death of Lucan the Butler. Another opportunity is missed in the attitude toward Arthur. In spite of the warning at an earlier point that the king has not deserved or won the hearts of his people, he appears here as a popular prince, whose death is generally lamented,—a finale far less telling than Malory's brief bitter touch, that the public for the most part held by Mordred, "the people were so new-fangle." The English version is less obsessed by Lancelot than is the French; it can forget him for the moment when the dying king withdraws to Avalon. But it is in keeping with the unbroken emphasis in the earlier romance that Arthur's last thought there is for the friend who has betrayed him. "Ah, Lancelot," he cries, "the most valiant man in the world, and the best knight and the most courteous save Galahad

your son! Would to Jesus Christ that you held the land of Logres and that I knew it!"[1] The cry is effective but a little overstrained. Better far is the treatment in the English *Morte*, where the full dignity of the national epic is felt undisturbed, at the moment of the passing of Arthur.

[1] Vulgate Version of Arthurian Romances, Sommer, vi., p. 379.

CHAPTER III

PARALLELS TO BOOK XVIII

IT will be well at this point to make a more detailed examination of some one section in Malory's book, as compared with the corresponding portion of other versions. A good part to choose is the eighteenth book, with the stories of the poisoning of Sir Patrise and of the Maid of Astolat; for these stories are found not only in the prose *Lancelot* but also in the middle English poem, written at least a hundred years before Malory. To place the three forms side by side is to find suggestive hints as to the degree in which development is due to Malory, or may already have occurred before his day.

Malory's version runs very close to the older forms; indeed, the resemblance between his work and the poem is so great, extending even to verbal detail, that a lively controversy has been waged as to whether or no the poem was his direct source. The answer seems at present to be negative, yet it is difficult to resist the conclusion that although Malory's version can not be wholly accounted for from the poem, he must have had a copy of that work before him while he wrote. There is, however, one great difference between his telling of the tale and that of both his predecessors. He narrates the episodes consecutively; the prose *Lancelot* and the poem alike interweave them, interrupt-

ing the story of the Maid of Astolat to give the story of the poisoning, and pausing before the climax of the Ordeal of Guenevere for the scene where the dead maiden floats down the river. The shading and contrast which Malory obtains from his sequence are thus forfeited, though on the other hand a good effect is gained by leaving Guenevere in suspense whether or no she can secure a champion while the action pauses for the burial of Elaine, and the consequent discovery on the part of the queen of her foolish unreason in exiling from court the only man on whom she could depend.

The poisoning, in both the *Lancelot* and the poem, is quite unmotived, and the episode concerning it slips out from the causal circle in which Malory so admirably holds it. For in Malory, it will be remembered that the attempt to poison Gawain which leads to suspicion being cast on the queen, is made by dependents of the House of Lamorak,—that smoldering feud which plays so important a part in Malory being thus effectively recalled to mind.[1] In the other versions, there is no hint of this connection, and the whole incident is accidental. Guenevere makes no formal dinner, as in Malory, "to show outward" that she favors other knights as well as Lancelot; she simply happens to sit at meat—the prose romance says it is in her own apartment—beside a knight to whom she innocently, as in Malory, hands the poisoned fruit. The dinner in Malory has much ceremonial dignity, and is narrated with pleasant detail, even to Gawain's special liking for apples and pears, owing to his being a hot knight of his blood. The confusion in which it breaks up, the clash and rage, the outbreak of violent suspicion, are excellently given. The other versions

[1] *Cf.*, p. 319.

miss all this, and replace dramatic condensation by lagging narrative. Sir Mador, brother not kinsman of the poisoned knight, is not present at the dinner. He finds his brother's body later, lying in a chapel, and swears vengeance. The ensuing situation is however the same in all three forms. Guenevere has driven Lancelot from the court, and his kinsmen hold off from her in her hour of need. They are in a state of high disgust with her, and Ector, in the French, has even a prevision of a great war to come between Lancelot's men and those of Arthur: "Vous verrez encore entre notre parenté et le parenté le roi Artu la grignor guerre que vous oncques veissiez,"[1] says he, to his friends.

The queen is impeached, and word of her plight spreads through the country. Lancelot privately determines to rescue her, although in the French romance he shows very little enthusiasm for the affair, and even apparently believes her guilty! "Car je sais vrai bien," he says to Bors, "à ce que j'ai entendu et oi dire que le tort en est siens et le droit est en Mador."[2] One can hardly imagine Malory's Lancelot thinking or saying that! Arthur and Guenevere continue their desperate entreaties to Lancelot's kin to undertake the quarrel; but Malory alone has the effective touch of Arthur's rebuke to his queen: "'What aileth you,' said the king, 'ye can not keep Sir Lancelot on your side?'" That is the sort of addition in which Malory or his original shows his genius. Bors in all the versions is naturally the one to undertake the quarrel; but he speaks plain language to the queen in private. The French makes him decidedly sarcastic; in the poem he scolds her outright:

[1] Vulgate Version of Arthurian Romances, Sommer, vi., p. 253.
[2] *Ibid.*, vi., p. 262.

"'Madame,' he said, 'by cross on rood,
Thou art wele worthy to be brent;
The noblest body of flesh and blood
That ever was yet in erthe lent
For thy wille and thy wicked mood
Out of our company is went.'"[1]

The same motif is more delicately used by Malory: his Bors would never have told the queen that she "was well worthy to be brent." "Madam," said Sir Bors, "now miss ye Sir Lancelot, for he would not have failed you—and now ye have driven him out of the country, by whom ye and all we were daily worshiped by,—therefore madam I wonder how ye dare for shame require me to do anything for you."

The conclusion of the conflict is flat in the earlier versions; Malory's Ordeal on the other hand is in the grand style. The ceremonial sense in which he is rich and the dramatic sense in which he is richer appear in every line. In comparison with his treatment, the whole effect in both the French romance and the English poem appears faint and blurred.

The Elaine story is sweetly told in all three versions; yet the contrast in handling is even more marked. Only Malory mentions the name of the fair maid of Astolat. Perhaps she is a little more winning in the French than she is in the English poem; the twelfth-century tradition of fine emotional analyses seems still fresh in these pages, while the fourteenth-century poem takes her rather as a matter of course. The scenes between the maid and Gawain are charming in the French: Gawain makes love to her more than half seriously, and she, who is "si avenant" and "bien

[1] *Morte Arthur*—Two Early Eng. Romances, Everyman's, p. 128.

taillée et si bien plesant de totes choses," talks to him with delightful candor. He encourages her to believe herself loved by Lancelot. She tells no fib as in the English poem, where she boasts rather barefacedly of being Lancelot's "leman," but Gawain returns to court convinced that Lancelot has found his fate at last, reassures the king, and stirs up trouble with the queen. Lancelot, meanwhile, wounded in the tournament, has taken refuge with a very superfluous aunt of Elaine's. The superiority of Malory's version is manifest in many little details, as in the real agony conveyed by Lancelot's words when wounded, in contrast with the perfunctory remark that his wound is "grande et périlleuse," and in the pretty scene where Bors leaning on his bed tells him the gossip of the court. Elaine follows to her aunt's castle, and now, for the first time in the French, reveals her love to Lancelot; in the poem, she had declared herself on the very evening of his arrival at Astolat. It is a scene in the best French manner, which is very good indeed. The maid dresses herself beautifully to appear before her love, and approaches her subject daintily. Would not the knight who refused to love her be unkind? "Certes," says Lancelot, "if he were free. I am thinking of myself. Were I free as many a knight is, happy should I be if you bestowed your heart on me." "How, Sir, is not your heart your own?" asks the maid. "No, it is placed where I most rejoice to have it, in no other place could it be so well." "Certes, Sir," says she, "better that you have told me, for I shall the more swiftly die. Had you spoken more ambiguously, you had plunged my heart in a languor full of hope and sweetness: it is better as it is."

She tells her brother that she must die for Lancelot's

love; and once again she makes her plea, in vain reproaching Lancelot that her death will be a poor reward for her brother's devotion. The poisoning episode then breaks in; and there is also another episode, concerned with a fateful visit of Arthur to Morgan le Fay. And when next Elaine is met, she is floating on her barge down the river. It is this last scene that is most altered in Malory, and altered most for the better. Arthur and Gawain are in both older versions the two to discover the barge, to read the letter, to discuss the situation. Neither Lancelot nor Guenevere appears at all. Later, Gawain tells the queen the story, apologizing for his former tale of the love between Lancelot and the Maid of Astolat: and Guenevere, "as wroth as wind," wrings her hands and laments. There is a page missing here from the poem: it may have contained some passage between Lancelot and Guenevere. In the French romance, he learns from her in due time, a good deal later, of the damsel's death, and laments it, but merely accepts her apology in the brief words: "C'est dommage, car trop était bel. Dame, on mescroit maint preudhomme à tort."[1] Nothing here approximates the noble situation in Malory, where Gawain quite rightly drops out, the king and the queen are the ones to see the barge and read the letter, and Lancelot when sent for holds with both that fine colloquy every word in which is tense with suppressed meanings. The *Lancelot* indeed has not Malory's conception of Lancelot's character or mood at this point: it ignores the evident intention of the English writer to suggest a change wrought in his passion by the Grail-Quest, as shown by his constant effort to shield the queen and avoid publicity, and plainly says that

[1] Vulgate Version of Arthurian Romances, Sommer, vi., 269.

Lancelot is more careless of discovery than Guenevere herself.

Considering all this loss of opportunity, it is no surprise to find that the letter,[1] very gracefully worded in all versions, is in the two earlier addressed, not to Lancelot, but "To King Arthur and alle his knights that longen to the Rounde Table." The prose romance does not even name Lancelot as the cause of the maid's death. The poem is at its best in this passage: there is tender feeling in the king's words to Gawain as he sees "this swete derlynge" lying before him, and mourns over death's lack of courtesy in removing from the world so fair a thing: the letter is touching, and the situation is truly felt. But the finer dramatic possibilities are quite ignored, and the comparison certainly shows the sort of work Malory did on his original, in pulling his story together, in eliminating waste detail, in enhancing character through telling speech, and in touching the whole to a greater delicacy. In most of these respects, the poem shows an advance on the French prose, but Malory's version is in a different and higher category of art altogether from either of the others.

[1] *Cf.*, pp. 165, 322.

CHAPTER IV

SOME PHASES OF MALORY'S ART

A STUDY of almost any other passage from the *Morte Darthur* would have the same result. It would show the author working with a free hand, modifying, suppressing, enhancing, nearly always with heightened effect. But it is not only in this intimate structural work that the *Morte Darthur* marks a great artistic advance on its sources. Rightly to appreciate Malory's art, one must consider other phases of it,—notably his use of varying tempo, his handling of conversation, his production of romantic effects, and his inimitable style.

Nowise has modern narrative made greater artistic gains than in the matter of acceleration and retard. In a well-told story as in real life, the breath comes quickly as emotion rises to a climax, but settles into slow rhythmic ease in times of calm. Thackeray's habitual manner, for instance, is garrulous and confidential; leisurely analysis, description, and comment occupy the greater portion of his books. But this manner alternates with such brevity at the dramatic nodes that each word seems to do the work of ten, so that a paragraph may present and leave behind what long chapters have led toward. The great Russians, the French, do the same thing when the

drama becomes poignant. There is another method, less satisfying to either eagerness or delicacy; this is the method of the melodramatic school, used by Dickens, which elongates the crisis till the reader is defrauded of that swift perception outdistancing exposition, instinctive at intense points in the story if the link-work of transition has been properly done. This is not so good a way as the other, but what is worse still, is a monotonous movement which neither quickens nor slackens. Such monotony is exactly what habitually prevails in romance. There is nothing to distinguish transition from climax; the story ambles along, never changing its pace.

Almost alone among English story-tellers of the Middle Ages, if Chaucer be excepted, Malory uses change of tempo fully and with fine effect. The general impression in his work is of that large mediæval leisure which affords special gratification to those who savor it, nor is anybody likely to accuse the *Morte Darthur* of overconcentration. But the story can move very rapidly when it likes. In the earlier books, Malory is concise because he is eager to get over the ground quickly and have done with preliminaries. As soon as the romantic interest develops, in the book of Balin, for example, or in Book IV., the movement slackens and significant detail appears. In the Tristram books, he draws deep breaths and proceeds at his leisure; adopting more nearly than anywhere else the manner of his predecessors. There seems no reason why the story should ever stop, for it hardly proceeds and one cannot stop unless one moves. This old way of escaping from time into perpetuity has its charm. But it must be acknowledged that along here Malory fails to compress or expand with any special artistic impulse.

He regains himself in the Grail books, which are beautifully proportioned, the necessary reduction from the original being so planned as to hold Lancelot quite firmly in the central light. But it is as the end draws near that he achieves the real brevity of the master, such brevity as Shakespeare practiced, or Euripides. The swift movement in these final books is due to no sense of hurry but to the restraint of quickened emotion. The greatest scenes of all have the fewest words to spare. At the same time, when action is at its height, a pause may add dignity and increase suspense; as in case of the stately dialogue between Lancelot and the queen when he is surprised in her chamber and the knights are battering at the door with "a great form" which they have taken from the hall. Malory has always time for the vivid touch that makes the whole scene live: note how Gawain "waved and foined as he lay," when Lancelot had dealt him his death-wound. Sometimes the tension is artfully relaxed; sometimes, as in the fighting in France, the agony is painfully yet effectively prolonged. From the pages which narrate the final battle, and the death of Arthur, of Guenevere, and of Lancelot, no word could be spared.

Another secret of Malory's vitality is his handling of conversation. There is a great deal of dialogue in the *Morte:* indirect discourse continually slips into direct, as feeling quickens. Malory in this habit is merely following his models, for the old French romances are largely made up of conversation, each character being indiscriminately endowed with a marvelous flow of words. But there is no individuality of accent in the dialogue of the prose *Lancelot;* the speeches go on forever, and anybody might be saying anything. To claim for Malory that he had achieved the supreme

artistic miracle of making all his people speak in character would be too much; even the finest modern art falls short of life, in which no two people ever use the same vocabulary or the same cadence. But Malory does generally make us feel what sort of a person is talking, and what the circumstances are. His hermits drone on, catching the authentic accent of the mediæval homily, as anyone can see by turning to their expositions in the Grail books: "And the Castle of Maidens betokeneth,—and the seven knights betoken"—one more "betoken," and we, like Gawain, shall run away. The knights, on the other hand, speak succinctly and to the point: "Corsabrin, said Palomides, wilt thou release me yonder damsel and the pensel? Then was Corsabrin wroth out of measure, and gave Palomides such a buffet that he kneeled on one knee. . . . And therewith he raced off his helm and said, Corsabrin yield thee or else thou shalt die of my hands. Fie on thee, said Corsabrin, do thy worst. Then he smote off his head." . . .[1] "Sayest thou that?" said the black knight, now yield thy lady from thee, for it beseemeth never a kitchen page to ride with such a lady. Thou liest, said Beaumains, I am a gentleman born, and of more high lineage than thou, and that will I prove on thy body."[2]

The speech of Lancelot, as is fitting, varies according to his mood. When he is making his confession, when he speaks to a gentlewoman, when he addresses a brother in arms, he finds the perfect accent. But now and again, a quick disposition breaks though his courtesies. A foolish woman, shooting at random in the woods, wounds him ignominiously just when he is straining to gain strength for a tournament, and Lancelot throws

[1] Malory, *Morte Darthur*, x., 47, p. 48.
[2] *Ibid.*, vii., 7, p. 190.

his usual politeness to the winds: "He hurled up woodly, and . . . when he saw that she was a woman he said thus, Lady or damosel, what that thou be, in an evil time bear ye a bow; the devil made you a shooter." In vain she fusses, apologizes, talks futile femininity: "Alas, ye have mischieved me," is all Lancelot will say. There is an endearing sort of simplicity about Lancelot. Wounded he cries for help: "Then he said with an high voice, O gentle knight Sir Lavaine, help me that this truncheon were out of my side, for it sticketh so sore that it nigh slayeth me." Even with Guenevere, he can on occasion be constrained and bitter. When she would send him, capriciously enough, to the tournament at Winchester, "Madam, said Sir Lancelot, I allow your wit, it is of late come syne ye were wise." It is noteworthy however that after exposure comes, when Guenevere is reproached and reviled, Lancelot's scrupulous courtesy returns. His dignity of speech throughout the scenes before Joyous Garde is wholly admirable.

These people do not harangue, though they can make good speeches at need: they converse, and red blood flows through their words. Some men are insolent, some gracious and "fair-languaged," some crusty. The tone of Arthur is full kingly, though he can stoop to coax in his distress, when he appeals to Sir Bors, "gentle knight," "courteous knight," to do battle for the queen. There is real repartee and intercourse. Note the dialogue between Anglides and her son Alisaunder when she swears him to avenge his father; note the light chat, full of individuality, between Dinadan, Palomides, and Tristram, the interview of Lancelot and Elaine after the begetting of Galahad, the talk between Lancelot and Guenevere when he enters the castle of Meleagrance,

his blood still hot from rescuing her. These passages and many others could with slight modifications be transferred to the stage. Indeed, Malory uses a larger amount of dialogue in proportion to narrative than much modern fiction. The reason is plain. The modern fashion of transcribing thoughts is all but unknown to mediæval literature, and the story if well told has to develop through a constant flow of vigorous conversation.

But the style attains vitality in other ways than through conversation. The use of detail is rich. To give examples would be to quote from every page. When Arthur "lightly and fiercely" pulls the sword out of the stone, when a "great horse grimly neighed," when Sir Marhaus, wounded by Tristram, "rose grovelling and threw his sword and his shield from him," when Morgan seeks to kill her husband King Uriens and the damsel brings her her sword "with quaking hands," when Margawse rebukes Arthur because he had kept Gareth in the kitchen, "and fed him like a poor hog," when the phantom giant knights who guard the Chapel Perilous "grinned and gnashed at Sir Lancelot," when Tristram "came a soft trotting pace toward them," the tale flashes into life. It will be noticed that nearly all these are motor expressions; Malory sees his people in action, and the long descriptions common in early romance, especially in verse, are rare. But no poem can convey a more romantic impression than the English romance when it likes: "Then the king looked about the world,"—delightful expression!—

and saw afore him in a great water a little ship, all apparelled with silk down to the water, and the ship came right unto them and landed on the sands.—So they went in all

three, and found it richly behanged with cloth of silk. By then it was dark night, and there suddenly were about them an hundred torches set upon all the sides of the ship-boards and it gave great light, and therewithal there came out twelve fair damosels and saluted King Arthur on their knees.[1]

Pictures are more often suggested than presented, however, as in the account of the Valley of Stones, of the damosel kneeling half an hour before Abelleus in the mire, of the "little leaved wood near where the tournament should be."

Malory's nomenclature is not so fine as that of many romances: it can not, for instance, approach the extraordinary romantic suggestiveness of the names in *Perceval le Gallois*. Yet Hellawes the Sorceress, Lady of the Castle Nigramous, is an interesting person though nothing be known of her but her name, and the English knights, Sir Gilbert, Sir Baudwin, and the rest, play their part pleasantly among French and allegorical personages. The vocabulary is doubtless one source of the book's charm. It has for the modern reader just enough archaism to be racy without obscurity: "Then Plenorious gat his horse, and came with a spear in his hand walloping toward Sir Lancelot; and then they began to feuter their spears, and like two bulls they lashed together with great strokes and foynes." The "armyvestal" countenance of Arthur, the "orgulous" cursing by the Bishop, the court held "full plenour" are words worth while. As a rule, however, adjectives are simple and scant, nouns and verbs doing the work. Vigor is won by repetition: "For she was false, and the sword and

[1] Malory, *Morte Darthur*, iv., p. 97.

the scabbard were counterfeit and brittle and false." Monosyllables carry many telling passages with hardly a break: "No, said she, an thou didst leave that sword, Queen Guenevere shouldst thou never see. Then were I a fool an I would leave this sword, said Lancelot." The habitual movement is simple as it is stately. And chief among Malory's assets must be reckoned the marvelous cadence of his style; a quality more surprising the more intimate one is with mediæval prose:

> Well, said Balin, syne I shall thereto I am ready, but traveling men are oft weary and their horses too; but though my horse be weary my heart is not weary, I would be fain there my death should be.
>
> Then Sir Lancelot asked her where he might be harbored that night. Ye shall not find this day nor night, but tomorn ye shall find harbor good, and ease of that ye be in doubt of. And then he commended her unto God. Then he rode till that he came to a cross, and took that for his host as for that night.[1]

The music of prose with its controlling laws is still imperfectly understood; but the Middle Ages knew that such a thing existed. Mediæval Latin had advanced from a metric prose dependent on quantity to a rhythmical prose dependent on accent: such can be found in many Church fathers, as for instance Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine; to give a British example, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is written in this way. Prose in the vernacular had often been wholly flat, a mere series of unharmonized sounds; yet it had also at times

[1] See Saintsbury, *History of English Prose Rhythm*, London, 1912, pp. 82–92.

caught the law of rhythmic movement from the low Latin. The Old English translation of Bede, for instance, is rhythmical, yielding a "cursus" now "planus," now "tardus," now "velox." As the Middle Ages continued, however, prose knew little development. When it was used as an emotional vehicle, a usual method was to intersperse, loosely and irregularly, lines with scansion of verse or with more or less regular alliteration; a method used with effect not unpleasing, for example, in the religious meditations of Richard Rolle, where an exceeding tenderness quickens in him again and again the "canor" which he describes as correlative with "calor" in contemplative passion.[1] There is no such introduction of bastard meters into the prose movements of Malory. His rhythms are prose, not verse.[2] But the rhythm is there, as is immediately evident if such passages as those quoted above are compared with the dismal absence of inward music in such prose as Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*. Better still, one may place beside them a passage from that other fifteenth-century Arthurian romance, the Vulgate *Merlin*, almost of the same period as Malory, and dealing with cognate matter:

But above all he coveted the king's daughter, and right heartily she him loved, and mused hereon so much that she was sore troubled, and fain would she have him to be her lord and mate above all those that ever she had seen before, and the stories say that she was the wisest lady of all the

[1] See *Yorkshire Writers:* Richard Rolle. Ed. by C. Horstman—London, 1896, vol. i., page vii.

[2] "The dominant of Malory's rhythm is mainly iambic, though he does not neglect the precious inheritance of the trochaic or amphibrachic ending, nor the infusion of the trochaic run elsewhere" (Saintsbury). A three beat foot is very frequent.

bloye Bretayne, and the fairest and the best beloved that ever was in the land or country save only Elaine that was without peer, that was the daughter of King Pelles of Lytenoys, of the castle of Corbenic, that was niece to King Pescheor, and of the sick king wounded, whereof the name of the town was cleped Alain de Lille in Lytenors.[1]

More than rhythm is lacking to that prose; some power of organization must precede harmony. But the *Merlin* forfeits its claim to be literature if only by the deadly flatness of the measure. It marks no advance on the *Parson's Tale*, adding words to words in the same stupid sequence of unintelligent speech, unillumined and unvaried. Within Malory's flexible prose on the other hand, the rhythms of life move obscure but deep. It is sensitive to them as waters to the sky or tides to the moon. At times, it catches the solemn movement of a liturgical chant, as when the sister of Percivale gives her blood to heal a lady; again, the gallop of chivalry on the road sounds through it, spirited and free, or it echoes the broken excitements of an arrival or a departure:

Then Sir Palomides sailed evenlong Humber to the coasts of the sea, where was a fair castle. And at that time it was early in the morning, afore day. Then the mariners went unto Sir Palomides that slept fast. Sir Knight, said the mariners ye must arise for here is a castle there ye must go into. I assent me, said Sir Palomides; and therewithal he arrived. And then he blew his horn that the mariners had given him. And when they within the castle heard that horn they put forth many knights, and there they stood upon the walls and said with one voice, Welcome be ye to this castle.[2]

[1] Merlin, *E. E. T. S.*, ii., ch. xiv.

[2] Malory, *Morte Darthur*, x., 61, p. 74.

That is Malory at his plainest. At his best, when Arthur mourns over his knights departing on the Grail-Quest, when Lancelot and Guenevere part, in the Elegy on Lancelot, in the Passing of Arthur, his style has quality more rare:

Alas, said King Arthur unto Sir Gawain, ye have nigh slain me with the avow and promise that ye have made; for through you ye have bereft me the fairest fellowship and the truest of knighthood that ever were seen together in any realm of the world; for when they depart from hence I am sure they all shall never meet more in this world, for they shall die many in the quest. And so it forthinketh me a little, for I have loved them as well as my life, wherefore it shall grieve me right sore, the departition of this fellowship. For I have had an old custom to have them in my fellowship. And therewith the tears filled in his eyes.[1]

That is the true magic of prose, more subtle, one is tempted to say, than the magic of poetry,—the rise and fall as of waves swelling to the break, uneven yet harmonic, obedient in flexibility and freedom to law deeper than we can discern. Malory's style is truly "the man." It belongs to no school, is the result of no tradition. It is a gift from above.

[1] Malory, *Morte Darthur*, xiii., p. 172; also Ch. 8.

CHAPTER V

CAUSALITY IN ROMANCE

I

THE final quality of Malory's art lies deeper than cadence or dramatic narrative; it is his power of suggestion. Through the early part of the Morte a sense of hidden meaning is intermittent. It is conveyed largely through omens, prophecies, and hints of under-rhythm in the events. As the work goes on, the impression grows, till the whole story seems to move to some unheard music from secret places. To read it is like watching a complex dance, controlled by some orchestra which fails to meet the ear.

Such quickening suggestiveness is the hallmark of romance at its conclusion rather than its inception. There is hardly a trace of it in the straightforward movement of Arthurian chronicles. Nor have the French verse-romances much of this quality though they inaugurate the romantic tradition. Twelfth-century poets did not know that they were writing romance. The memories their work enshrines were unconscious, and what most fascinates us in them is often what to them was mere daily commonplace. Their poems flow as brightly as shallow waters over a clear bottom and while iridescent lights play through them, one is always conscious that the channel is not profound. It deepens as time goes on. In the long prose narratives from

which Malory drew, the stream of romance has already its dark currents, its tantalizing half-translucence; as Prof. Ker points out, these works with all their defects have more romantic quality in the modern sense than the poems have.[1] In Malory, the process is complete and one gazes into the flux of life with an intuition that its depths are unsounded and its source is far. The *Morte Darthur* is as full as the *Faerie Queene* of those echoes which "roll from soul to soul, and live forever and forever." It has more affinity with Keats and Coleridge than with Chrétien de Troies.

This impression of significance is not only conveyed by the detail of style, it is inherent in the whole conception; one must return at the end of this study of Malory to the same characteristic of his art which was noted at the outset. A sense of secret intention is rarely absent even in the most care-free and offhand passages; beneath the happy spaciousness, the apparent rambling, which impart surface charm, the whole story moves as Maeterlinck would put it in the shadow of a great expectation. And the explanation of Malory's heightened art is that the principle of causality has taken full possession of his mind.

This principle is more difficult for the romantic temperament to grasp than for the classic; for romance is born of conscious release into limitless freedom, and in its lighter moments snaps its fingers at cause and law. Yet the perception of law, which dominates classic art, if less irresistible and fundamental than the intuition of freedom, is more apparently justified by dispassionate scrutiny of the universe; and as the scope of romance widened to include a complex of human destinies, romance had to find this out. It was all

[1] *Cf.* p. 74.

very well for the *dramatis personæ* of twelfth-century fancy to live lives light and wandering as the wind, controlled only by the pleasant severities of a self-imposed code. Slowly, down the centuries, can be watched the rising conflict between this intuition of freedom and the gradually awakening recognition of an inhibiting and governing law. Neither will give way. Romance at no point forfeits the fascinations of freedom; it depends on them for its very being. Yet more and more it responds to the relentless revelation of a universe not governed by caprice but by an inevitable causal sequence. All noble romance gives such response. In Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, the Law, however lost sight of in pleasant meanderings, does at the end "bring back all wanderers to a single track" of a moral order. The romantics of the eighteenth century made a reactionary attempt to cast law to the winds; and their fantastic work is forgotten. The great romantics of the nineteenth century, though they repudiated rule and routine, regained a steady intuition of the law to which all seeming freedom must conform. In their best work, as in the *Ancient Mariner*, the principle of causation finds triumphant illustration in the wildest apparent inconsistencies, and overawes by its hidden but all-pervading presence. Probably the attempt to depict a universe governed by chance will never be repeated, for the race has outgrown its childhood, and only childhood can try the experiment of freedom uncontrolled.

Arthurian romance covers the period during which Europe was growing up; and the developing recognition of causality can clearly be traced in it. In the amorphous mass of the prose romances, the principle struggles to emerge; and the study of them throws much light

on the slow growth of narrative art; they abound in half-realized schemes, all more or less inchoate but full of interest if one reads between the lines. Perhaps, as was hinted earlier, the use of narrative matter in large masses tends automatically to suggest causality;[1] perhaps experience did its work as feudalism and Catholicism grew older. In any case, while the story expanded through the collaboration of many minds, the sense of purpose increased, and sundry attempts were made to centralize the theme and to draw uncorrelated elements into unity.

But the very process of expansion, going on all the time, obscured this other hesitant process; and it is no wonder if the popular impression of these romances is that of unmotived confusion. The process of concentration had to follow the process of expansion before the artistic achievement of Arthurian romance could be made clear. In this last process, Malory's work was the climax. The chief difference between the English *Morte Darthur* and the older romances is the intensification of purpose. Where it was confused, it has grown plain; where it worked blindly, it has come out into the light. And the last angle from which Malory's work can be appreciated is that which compares his plotting with the frustrated attempts at design and unity in the intricate romantic development which preceded.

II

Arthurian romance abounds in false starts and in miscarriages of intention, and more than one promising plan was discarded as time went on. Some works, like *Perceval le Gallois*, while exceptionally fine in detail, show

[1] See page 183.

a maze of cross-purposes. In others, the original intention was discarded as the story continued. An instance of this type is the *Lancelot*. As has been already noticed, this romance shows the disposition to exalt the French tradition at the expense of the English, and to degrade Arthur. From the first, the king is bitterly condemned for his failure to help his vassal King Ban in Ban's hour of mortal need; Lancelot's relations with the queen thus become a sort of Nemesis action, and the disasters which befall the realm owing to the final rupture with Lancelot would be the just judgment on Arthur for his sin. More than one emphatic passage in the earlier part of the romance scores the king, and points the way to a doom which he must undergo in consequence of his wrong-doing. The idea is not bad; but it would not blend with the traditional story, and before the end it is obscured if not forgotten. Lancelot, in the original plan, was to find his chief duty in recovering his father's kingdom and in punishing the usurper Claudas. This also would have been a rounded epic action; it is technically performed, and long parts of the romance narrate Lancelot's wars with Claudas. But so far as interest goes, the sentimental theme, the love with Guenevere, has overshadowed everything else and the romance gives a completely uncentralized impression. Malory, or his source, did well in leaving out the elaborated figure of Claudas, and all the intrigue retrospectively referring to Ban.

Another interesting example of purpose deflected or lost is the figure of Morgan le Fay. In Malory, she is a sinister and fascinating but ineffective personage. Her machinations annoy, but accomplish nothing worse than to stir up a little surface trouble here and there.

Indications suggest that she once played a far more important part, less unworthy of her ancient and evil origin, as a Chooser of the Slain or a Celtic war-goddess. Morgan and Merlin come on the scene at about the same time, he the protector, she the enemy of Arthur; and although in one confused version the two are lovers, they are naturally opposed throughout the action. Morgan's intentions are always evil; at first she even seeks the murder of the king. But after a little her purpose focuses on enmity to Guenevere, and on the attempt to reveal the hidden corruption of the court and so to shatter the illusions of Arthur and to thwart the divine intent. She is particularly anxious to expose the sin of Lancelot and the queen. In Malory she fails completely. Even in the *Lancelot*, her importance is less than it may have been in earlier forms of the story; but she is much more significant and prominent, and her wiles play a leading part in the causal sequence. For Arthur, who has repudiated the repeated warnings of Agravaine, is lured in his hunting to Morgan's palace, where Lancelot had been long imprisoned. The apartment in which the king is entertained is adorned with paintings, and Arthur as we are naïvely told knew enough of letters to read the inscriptions around these works of art. His skill was to his sorrow; for these paintings had been made by Lancelot, who solaced his heart in imprisonment by depicting on the wall the whole story of himself and the queen, just as Tristram in Thomas's poem made statues in the forest of himself and Iseult. The paintings convince the reluctant king of the lovers' guilt and precipitate the catastrophe: Morgan had preserved them for that end. Malory drops out this whole chain of events, as well as the effective opposition in the

Lancelot between Morgan and the benevolent Lady of the Lake, Lancelot's godmother,—another personage once prominent in the plot. His Morgan is left in the air,—a vague, threatening figure, much feared, carefully indicated, but in the end wholly inconclusive.

But the most striking instance of an abandoned plan is also the most audacious expansion of the original legend: it is the enlargement of scope associated rightly or wrongly with the name of de Borron. This enlargement transformed Geoffrey's somewhat conventional story of a ruler who exalted the glory of England by achieving world-empire, but was betrayed at last by his own blood, into something quite different. It saw in the Arthuriad an attempt to restore harmony between earth and heaven; the fulfillment of Sacramental ideals of perfect sanctity in the political life of a great nation. To this end, it drew into a single concept of eternal life manifest in time, the Table of the Last Supper where the apostles were first fed by the Food of Immortality, the Grail-table in the wilderness, and the Table Round where the great knights rally for refreshment as they pursue their work of creating a Christian nation. The grandiose idea came late. It was perhaps the final effort of the creative imagination during the period of vital romantic growth. And it could not command conviction. Long before Malory's time, that scheme which was to have shown the triumphant march of mediæval humanity toward a restoration of its ideal had been deflected and changed into a defeat.

The strongest witness to the change of direction is Merlin, for the whole conception of his rôle has altered. In de Borron's trilogy, his figure knit the entire scheme together. Begotten of a fiend that he may become the

instrument of Hell to prevent the restoration of the Grail to England, he becomes instead, through his mothers' prayers, the instrument of God to protect the Round Table, and the Fore-runner of the Holy Vessel. According to this carefully motived plan, his life would have been triumphant whatever his personal fate, for he would have contributed to that final Christianizing of the realm on which his strange will was set. But in Malory's version, there is no triumph for Merlin. The Cassandra rôle is assigned to him, for he understands the dangers which he is powerless to avert. Malory indicates this with light swift stroke when Arthur proposes to wed Guenevere. In the Vulgate *Merlin*, still fairly close to de Borron's conception, the enchanter plans the marriage. His attitude in Malory is quite the contrary. He listens in somber mood to Arthur's imperious demands for the maiden, warns the king covertly "that it was not wholesome for him to have her," and then in a fine touch seeks spiritual consolation, "for so he turned his tale to the adventures of the Sangraal." Merlin's figure is profoundly sad, and his own beguiling becomes a rhythmic symbol of the miscarriage of the entire plan he fain would further. It can hardly be questioned that he is more impressive in defeat than he could be in success. For after all, what else than defeat was possible? De Borron's plan if successful would have run flatly athwart the most tenacious and essential fact in the original story,—the overthrow of Arthur and his retreat to Avalon.

But the failure of Merlin does not mean that blind Fate has triumphed or that the devils win the day. It only means that romance accepted fact, as it must do if it is to retain any veracity at all. What Malory did was to turn aside both from de Borron and from the

chroniclers. He rejected alike the faintly-traceable dream of a struggle leading to ultimate victory, and the older story of an unmotived and accidental tragedy. His version transforms the Arthuriad into a Nemesis Action, perfectly developed and profoundly satisfying to the human craving for justice; and as a result he brought the story back to the earth we know. And what de Borron's scheme contributed to this final form of the epic is of incalculable value. The vision of a kingdom in which the Mysteries of God are openly manifest and protected by the secular arm is beyond the compass either of mediæval or modern belief. But the stern recognition that failure in the quest for holiness means ultimate national disgrace is no less true, and Malory's version knows it. All mediæval writers, trained in Catholic disciplines, conceived the will as free. The Christian conception of responsibility, not the Greek conception of necessity, underlies Malory's work; it is no mesh of hopeless circumstance in which his characters find themselves. The web which entangles them is of their own weaving, and the doom which overtakes them, the destruction of the aims they have cherished, is the solemn witness to the freedom they have enjoyed. If the whole nexus of events reveals unrelenting law, the individual characters are never conceived as victims, for their choice shapes the events. Fate, as romance at its best presents it, is one with law because it never falters, it is one with freedom because it is self-imposed.

So the chivalric ideal takes its place among the many unrealized ideals of harmony among the forces needed to create a perfect manhood or a perfect state. Nor is its failure quite complete. Deliberate sin, not on the part of enemies, but on the part of those chosen

and dedicate, overthrows the Table Round. But because this sin is less the victory of evil undisguised than the result of good loyalties too exclusively followed, faith in humanity is greater not less when the book is ended. The nation is destroyed, but the individual is rescued, and though the modern seeker for the Grail cannot rest in this result, it is a partial triumph which suffices to reconcile the soul to art and life. Romance may never again offer the simulacrum of freedom afforded by a long tether and ample space for wandering as it did in the days of its youth; but it can give more. For romance is the offspring of Christianity, and Christianity knows that to a sinful race there is one life only which ensures the freedom of the sons of God. It is the life of penitence,—and on the note of penitence, therefore on the note of hope, the Arthuriad concludes.

The ideal of narrative art has been defined by a good critic as "epic fullness of life within the limits of romantic form," or "the recovery of the fuller life of epic for the benefit of romance."[1] This ideal, he goes on to say, was never attained in the Middle Ages though many mediæval writers seem to be making their way toward it. The contention of this book is that Malory has attained the ideal. There can be no question of the "fullness of life" within the *Morte Darthur*, and this fullness is redeemed from romantic inconsequence and raised to epic dignity by the all-pervading sense of purpose, which binds the broad conception into unity. Malory's is a winding road which moves in great curves under varying skies; but in his farthest wanderings into seemingly irrelevant

[1] W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 355.

regions, his sense of direction is never lost. And in consequence it is hardly too much to claim that the *Morte Darthur* is the most important single book produced in England during the Middle Ages. Chaucer is indubitably a greater genius than Malory: the schools of Langland produced more penetrating writing on one special line. Certain poets, notably the author of *Sir Gawaine* and *The Pearl*, have perhaps surpassed Malory in charm. But no other book so carries the weight and force of a whole epoch, crystallized in the alembic of the imagination, and emerging in its immortal part alone.

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